The Dissertation Committee for Kathryn Anna Bedecarré Certifies that this is the approved version of the following Dissertation:

Doing the Work
The Black Lives Matter Movement in Austin, Texas

Committee:

João H. Costa Vargas, Co-Supervisor

Edmund T. Gordon, Co-Supervisor

Stephen H. Marshall

Omi Osun Joni L. Jones

Jaime Amparo Alves

Joy James

Doing the Work
The Black Lives Matter Movement in Austin, Texas

by

Kathryn Anna Bedecarré

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

December 2018

Dedication

To truth tellers

Acknowledgements

I have accrued an enormous debt of gratitude with the activists of Austin's expansive Movement for Black Lives. This is principally written to you and to future generations of Black social movements here in the U.S. and across the diaspora.

A huge debt of thanks is owed also to João Costa Vargas for working with me even after our cringe worthy first meeting where i agonized over "my book" and, even more astonishingly how to "brand" myself as an ethnographer of the Black diaspora. Anything potentially worthwhile about this project is due to what his scholarship, generosity and example enabled. Every shortcoming, my own.

To friends and colleagues who listened or encouraged at whatever stage, whether they agree with my final analysis or not: Gabby Randle, Tyler English-Beckwith, CJ Healy, Peace and Love El Henson, Sara Saylor, students of UGS 303 Blackness and Mass Incarceration, Edmund T. Gordon, Stephen H. Marshall, Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, Jaime Amparo Alves, Joy James, Patrice D. Douglass, kihana miraya ross, Tryon P. Woods, P. Khalil Saucier, Frank Wilderson, Maya Berry, Sarah Ihmoud, Melissa Burch, Drea Brown, Yesenia Selier, Pamela Calla, Sarah Sarzynski, Michelle Chase, Sarah Lawrence Ethic Studies Movement comrades, Maddie and Adrien and John, Megan and Jonathan and Jayes, Laura, Nafisa, Katie, and Sydnor.

Thank you to the department of African and African Diaspora Studies, the College of Liberal Arts, and my parents for their financial support.

Abstract

Doing the Work
The Black Lives Matter Movement in Austin, Texas

Kathryn Anna Bedecarré, PhD

The University of Texas at Austin, 2018

Supervisors: João H. Costa Vargas, Edmund T. Gordon

This dissertation explores the tension in Black political thought between redemptive and revolutionary frameworks for social change. The following study, the first ethnography of the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLMM), situates this longstanding debate within the context of our present moment. While political theorists form a consensus that the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) holds the potential to perfect or radicalize U.S. democracy, they have not yet reckoned with the country's enduring and implicit antiblack bias. The lack of critical attention paid to how antiblackness operates within racial justice movements limits activists' capacity to create much needed transformative social change. In "Doing the Work" I address this gap in research by conducting an activist ethnography of Black Lives Matter organizing in Austin, Texas during the final year of the Obama presidency and the first year of the Trump administration. Through participant observation of vigils, city council meetings, cop watches, and sanctuary movement rallies I found a pattern wherein antiblack violence is recognized (by the state and the coalition), but only in comfortable or self-affirming ways. Again and again I observed nonblack empathy turn to self-

congratulation, small concessions from city officials become huge celebrations, and mass outrage directed at the family separation crisis mutate into a disavowal of the war being waged against Black families. Additionally, I noticed a tendency among organizers to police radical and revolutionary political desire, no matter how benign or incipient. In other words, this study examines how an enduring and antiblack unconscious operates in Austin's BLM movement spaces regardless of one's politics or intentionality. This portrait of contemporary antiracist praxis suggests the master's tools (Lorde 1979) that present the greatest danger to Black Liberation struggles are not autonomy and self-defense, but rather the politics of recognition, intersectionality and historical materialism. Ultimately, I argue that it is Black anger, and not the Sisyphean model of Black love/forgiveness, that offers the most compelling speculative work for the future of Black Studies and Black movements.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Introduction: "This is not Ferguson"

FEBRUARY 2016

After officer Geoffrey Freeman murdered 17-year old David Joseph, Austin's nascent Black Lives Matter Movement reaches an apex. Activists host a series of packed emergency meetings at which we craft a list of demands and plan a day long mobilization at City Hall. In response to our well-attended protest, the city's police chief, Art Acevedo, invites Black Lives Matter leadership to appear in what he bills a "joint press conference." Standing behind an oversized podium, Acevedo magnanimously opens the spectacle, *"*I'm really proud to stand up here today, even under these very sad, tragic set of circumstances where a life was taken, a young life was taken...But this is a special city in that what I have up here today is [sic] some young people that are absolute leaders." He introduces each of the activists standing behind him as "my heroes." He praises them for working with APD and channeling their anger, "into positive things," and he assures the general-public that while there are certainly "fringes" of every social movement, "I know the hearts of *my* Black Lives Matter leaders," and, "what they want is what we all want," that is, "excellence in policing." Acevedo continues, leveraging the press conference on yet another police killing of an unarmed African American, into a publicity stunt to muse about, "why Austin's a model city;" "what's right with Austin;" and "the good things about Austin." The main message of the press conference is, "We aren't Ferguson. We're not another American city. We're the city of Austin."

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This unexpected press conference raised several questions for me about the emergent Black Lives Matter Movement and my participation in it. That morning I had been at city hall chanting, along with the multiracial crowd, "APD! You can't hide! We charge you with genocide!" That morning, David Joseph's death represented the anti-black genocidal violence that results in the execution of an African American by police every 28 hours. By nightfall, however, Acevedo had shifted the narrative away from the horrors perpetrated in the name of the antiblack city (Alves 2018) toward a celebration of Austin's supposedly unique, progressive character--and Black leaders literally stood behind this account. David's murder and our fury had somehow transformed Austin into an exceptional model of state responsiveness to Black suffering. After all, here was the chief of police saying, "Black Lives Matter!" Yet what Acevedo was also saying is that Black anger can only be generative if it is expressed in dialogue with the state and directed towards reform. The communiqué Acevedo sent Black Austin here is decidedly a threat, if only for the very fact of *who* is issuing it: Austin is not Ferguson. Do not revolt or there will be more violence. Work with the police or suffer the consequences.

As a young activist and scholar, I was shocked by the rapidity with which Black anger was co-opted. I wanted to know what to make of this process whereby Black death occasioned antiracists to seek recognition and redress from the state, but what activists actually empowered was the state's celebration of itself and the smothering of a Black politics that exceeds the desire for, "excellence in policing." A few days earlier, I sat in the St. James Missionary Baptist Church surrounded by Austin residents disgusted by

David Joseph's execution. At this meeting, there were a few people that questioned the paradoxical nature of staging an appeal to the antiblack state. One such moment occurred when a young Black woman proposed that we stop calling the police for help, and instead assemble and call upon a community task force. Another moment bubbled up when suggestions became extremely policy orientated. A voice from the back turned our attention to that collective impulse, and speculated about why it was so. In such moments, I heard a desire for Black autonomous work that did not petition the Master-state, but focused on Black self-defense. Yet the self-appointed leaders of that emergency meeting did not find such slippages into other radical imaginaries useful (although many in the pews snapped and clapped). I wanted to know, how come we did not take up the project of a community task force or fully explore the line of inquiry about state sanctioned forms of creating social change? Why had we decided to mobilize in the way that we did? What forms of Black political analysis and desire were 'pragmatic' and what approaches were now considered unthinkable? It was from this place of dissonance, this tension between a desire to perfect the state and its institutions and a desire for Black autonomy, that I unknowingly began my dissertation. I wrote a short essay on my organizing experience that grappled with what I saw as the policing and erasure of radical and revolutionary Black thought in the contemporary movement moment.

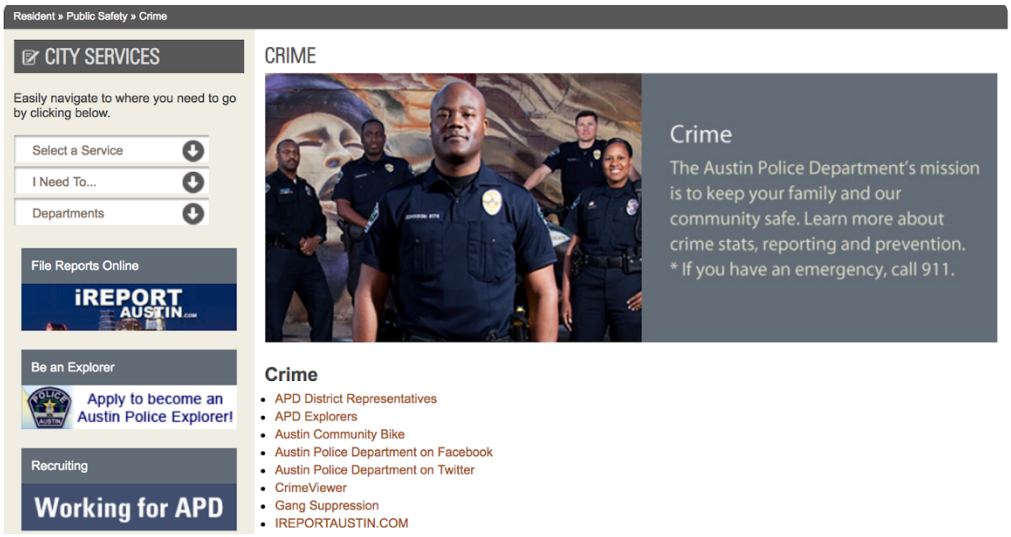


Figure 1.1 Black police officers stand in front of a mural painted on the side of the Victory Grill, a historic venue from the Jim Crow era Chitlin' Circuit. The Victory Grill served as an organizing base for the emergent Black Lives Matter Movement in Austin. Like the joint press conference, this image from APD's website can be read as both a staged gesture of recognition and a straightforward threat, uncomplicated by the presence of Black officers.

I also wrote that first essay in an effort to understand why this movement moment was so energizing to nonblack people. It bears mentioning that while BLM leadership was Black, the overwhelming majority of community activists were, like myself, white and nonblack people of color. I was anxious to grasp what, if any, was the role of nonblack people in Black movements-- and Black Studies? For, in addition to this recent organizing experience, I had just completed my first year as a doctoral student in UT Austin's Department of African and African Diaspora Studies. I entered the program convinced that I would conduct fieldwork in Cuba, but after sharing my essay with friends and colleagues I decided to focus my dissertation research on what I was already

involved in locally. Slowly, I grew to know "the field," that is, Austin's M4BL and Black Studies as a discipline. Both formations appeared to be deeply divided over petty personality conflicts or stubbornly harbored resentment towards those who encroached upon one's personal fiefdom of study or resistance. Each held the pretense of desiring revolutionary change, but in practice, both policed its members that dipped even just a toe into such speculative work (while at the same time, looking the other way when it comes to a host of bad behaviors). All this to say that I came to understand this dissertation project as a way of leaning into the contradictions and complexities of 'doing the work,' as the saying goes in antiracist spaces. I wanted to contribute to a project that asked, how can those of us committed to Black Liberation radically transform the contemporary political praxis of Black Studies and Black movements?

LITERATURE REVIEW: POLICING THE CRISIS

In the spirit of Stuart Hall's edited volume *Policing the Crisis* that examines "mugging" not as an actual criminal phenomenon, but as a lens into the moral panic it engenders in British society, this dissertation is in many ways a research project about the notion of "police brutality" as a lens into the kind of ethical scandal it has recently produced in the United States. The scare quotes of course are not intended to cast doubt on the stark realities of state violence, but rather to trouble the manner in which the phrase obscures the paradigmatic object of such violence (Wilderson 2014). Put differently, I am interested in, "the modes of sociality reflected in and produced by police violence" (Alves and Vargas 2015). While nothing has been written about these concerns

in the specific context of Austin, Texas, there has been a publishing boom around the national Black Lives Matter Movement moment. I have identified three trends within this larger conversation: those who frame the crisis of antiblack policing as a crisis of trust between law enforcement and Black neighborhoods; those who frame the crisis of antiblack policing as a crisis over the meaning of Blackness; and those who frame the crisis of antiblack policing as evidence of an ontological crisis.

One response to a growing awareness of antiblack policing is the movement to quantify it by generating further statistical evidence of racially targeted policing practices. Such work by government officials, policy wonks and scholars is undertaken in order to promote data informed policy change. This approach includes Department of Justice investigations into local police departments or other data collecting initiatives that reveal a pattern of anti-black police violence and virtual impunity: Black folks are more likely to be stopped, searched, arrested, brutalized, and executed over nonviolent- and often manufactured offenses; reports of misconduct are routinely discouraged and almost entirely ignored by department supervisors; and offending officers are rarely prosecuted, and even less likely to be found guilty by judges and juries. Likewise, experiments by social psychologists have uncovered a pervasive antiblack unconscious among both the general-public (Goff, Williams, Eberhardt, Jackson 2008) and police officers (Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, Davies 2004). Despite the gravity of these findings the DOJ, data scientists and social psychologists remain tirelessly optimistic. They interpret the problem at hand as a crisis of trust between Black communities and law enforcement that can be restored by adopting new policies, technologies, anti-bias trainings, community policing models,

representational parity, and other reforms. For these authors, an ethical relationship between Black communities and the police is possible. To borrow again from Acevedo, the solution to antiblack policing is, "excellence in policing."

If this first trend wants to gather data and further proof of antiblack policing, the second trend seeks to accumulate evidence of Black humanity. One aspect of this publishing boom is the autobiographical work of both "the mothers of the movement," who are writing against the criminalization of their children, and the founders and early organizers of the M4BL who are writing against the criminalization of Black social movements. The other trend is made up of scholars who document the BLMM, applaud its innovations, and urge it to adopt more complex accounts of Black oppression and resistance. This body of work argues that to bring about transformative change, the BLMM must assume an analytic framework that moves beyond blackness such as anti-colonialism (Kelley 2000); the intersectionality of struggles (Davis 2016); Black Queer Feminism (Carruthers 2018); human rights (Rameau, Adams and Robinson 2014), environmentalism (Coates 2015), anti capitalism (MXGM 2012; Taylor 2016; Hill 2016; Gilmore 2016) or anti- status quo (Abu Jamal 2015).

In a nutshell, these BLM activists and movement scholars understand the policing crisis as a crisis over the very meaning of Blackness. Whether consciously or not, all of this literature utilizes the explanatory framework of racial formation theory (Omi & Winant 1986) to grapple with the lethality of police and the phenomenon of mass incarceration. They tend to stress the interpretation that the War on Drugs manipulated a racialized fear of crime in order to garner society's consent for a state sanctioned racial

project (Alexander 2010). They argue that only a mass movement can unsettle and eventually transform contemporary racial meanings that dehumanize and criminalize Black and brown communities (Rogers 2015). They share a belief that 'being in the streets' (Robin-Leeds 2016; Goodman 2016) and solidarity/allyship (Roediger 2016) present fundamental challenges to the current social order. For these authors, Black Lives Matter holds the promise of forging a new consensus around a shared humanity-- a revolution in value brought about by nonviolent direct action and a commitment to re-making democracy (Glaude 2016). In other words, social movements will contest the state sanctioned account of Blackness as criminal and produce a new counter-hegemonic meaning of Blackness as human.

On the margins of this national conversation are those scholars that understand antiblack policing as evidence of an ontological crisis. Thinking through the ontological crisis requires an understanding of the Black diaspora's relationship to the state and civil society as one of terror, rather than hegemony (Wilderson 2003). Thus a war of position, the project of resignifying blackness, while a successful tactic for many forms of oppression, can never adequately address antiblackness. Antiblackness-as-ontological crisis requires an absolute destruction of the order of the world (Fanon 1961) and not a reconciliation between two competing 'racial' projects. Ultimately, these scholars suggest or gesture towards different forms of Black autonomy as the only viable alternative (Vargas 2018). I refer to this group of thinkers as Black autonomists.

Put another way, Black autonomists understand the lethal use of force against unarmed Black men, women, and children as but one articulation of the afterlife of

slavery. In other words, despite the end of slavery as a social institution, its power relations remain ongoing (Hartman 1997). Thus if the problem at hand is slavery, then there are serious implications for the previously discussed projects of reform and humanization. While these authors agree with reformists and radical humanists that the killings and their mediatic consumption illustrate that "black lives don't matter" (Vargas 2015), they add that even when civil society 'cares' the results are no less murderous (Sharpe 2016). Black suffering remains so fungible that it continues to give way to a trenchant denial of anti-blackness (Vargas 2018) whereby Black presence in the Black Lives Matter movement functions largely as a form of absence (Gordon 1999). These authors argue that the outrage engendered by the BLMM fortifies the antiblack state by organizing as if the polis is not engineered to manufacture Black death (Vargas and James 2014) and deploying analyses that render the theorization of the specificity of antiblackness impossible (Douglass 2018).

I would like to claim that my dissertation contributes the first long term ethnographic approach to this conversation around the antiblack policing crisis and the BLMM. However, I do not think such a warrant would be altogether honest. Certainly the work by BLM movement scholars and activists is deeply informed by their organizing experience as well as formal and informal interviews with participants. Their work has also utilized qualitative data collection to understand the contemporary political moment from the perspective of fellow organizers. They too have asked the ethnographic questions: what are people doing? What are they trying to accomplish? How exactly do they do this? What specific means and or strategies do they use? How do people talk

about, characterize and understand what is going on?[1] My own contribution to this conversation is only unique in that it considers how the literature on implicit bias has not yet been extended to BLM movement work. In other words, this study examines how an enduring and antiblack unconscious operates in movement spaces regardless of our politics and intentionality. Ethnography is a particularly useful tool to examine this dilemma because it can reveal the difference between what people say and what they do. My ethnographic evidence confirms and extends the interpretation of this moment as an ontological crisis. I found that while being 'on the ground' the interpretative schemas of reform and humanism are inadequate approaches to the urgent project of keeping the Black diaspora safe. I argue that my findings offer significant implications for the future of Black studies and Black social movements. Before I outline these findings in greater detail, I include a brief methodological note, and raise some of the study's limitations.

METHODOLOGY

As an activist ethnographer, I gathered qualitative data over a period of 24 months via *observant participation* (Vargas 2008), semi-formal interviews with fellow activists, and the recording of fieldnotes, meaning both the collection of flyers and other ephemera, as well as logging detailed daily journal entries recounting my activism or interview conversations. Activist ethnography largely means that I did not position myself in the field as a "neutral observer," but that I owned my participation in the BLM movement as both an activist and scholar. I preferred to conduct an *activist* ethnography for three

[1] Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz and Linda L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), Kindle Location 3916.

reasons. The first, because I did not want to choose between my deepest ethical commitments and my desire to become a scholar (Hale 2008). The second, I wanted to produce knowledge that was useful to Black social movements and not just my future 'career' in Black Studies. Lastly, I understood that activist ethnography generated more objective and rigorous data than traditional anthropological accounts (Hale 2008). Activist anthropology is a more objective social science in that it reckons with the discipline's (ongoing) history of violence (Tuhiwai Smith 1999); the material stakes of research (Harrison 1991); and thus, the inherently politicized nature of the researcher. Rather than rejecting charges of 'bias' we embrace a positioned objectivity (Hale 2008) that requires,

> explicit critical reflection on one's own subjectivity as a researcher…not just where you stand, but how you are viewed and positioned in the social context of your work) and systematic monitoring of how our relationship to research subjects affects both the content and the meaning of the data we collect.[2]

In other words, this sustained reflexive practice on politics and positionality, missing from most ethnographic accounts, generates more accurate and complex data.[3] Activist ethnographies are particularly rich because social movement spaces generate theoretical innovation (Hale 2008) and open-up further critical insights into the shortcomings of hegemonic knowledge production (Vargas 2008). This kind of ethnographic work is also unique for its analysis is typically dialogic and collaborative. Meaning, my comrades in Austin's Movement for Black Lives are not mere 'objects' of study or further data points,

---

[2] Charles Hale, "Introduction," in *Engaging Contradictions*, ed. Hale (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

[3] My own transparency about my identity as a white woman and my political commitment to Black Liberation allowed me access to activist spaces that are weary of government surveillance and other observers such as local reporters who rest comfortably in the pockets of the Austin Police Department.

but fellow theorists and movement scholars. Which is not to say that everyone in the field agrees, but simply that Black communities here in Austin, as elsewhere, are *theorizing for their lives* (James 2013).

While I agree that activist anthropology as a methodology is extremely generative, I want to push back on the idea that it is inherently liberatory. Ideally activist ethnographers of the African diaspora are accountable to the incentives of organized struggle and not to the inherent narcissism of the academic institution (James and Gordon 2008). Yet what if antiracist movements are not that different from the university? What if the Black Lives Matter Movement in Austin is similarly shaped by the self-policing, conformity, and complicity of the academy? What if the desires and social agreements of movement spaces are just as in need of transformation as institutional ones? Under these circumstances, where should the activist anthropologist's loyalties lie? I argue that in the struggle to produce *liberation-oriented knowledge* (Vargas 2008) and *push scholarly work past discourse to praxis* (Gordon 2007), activist ethnographers committed to Black Liberation may need to exit activism as we now know it. That is, I agree with Jaime Amparo Alves when he argues that a truly liberatory Black activist anthropology, one that takes the ontological crisis seriously, may need to abandon activism for insurgency. Alves muses briefly about what this kind of work would look like, "Would the black anthropologist join the riots, storm state facilities, set buses on fire, and stick up the wealthy homes, so that civil society will pay attention to black suffering?"[4] His questions remind me of a passage from Assata Shakur's autobiography, "Theory without practice is

[4] Jaime Amparo Alves, *The Antiblack City* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 29-30.

just as incomplete as practice without theory. The two have to go together. I was determined to do both."[5] Shakur's determination to do both prompt her to leave the Black Panther Party and take up the insurgent work of the Black Liberation Army. At the very least, Alves argues, this ethnographic turn towards insurgency requires abandoning the desire for the Beloved Community and the ethics of civil society. To be clear this dissertation is not a work of insurgent or outlaw anthropology (Alves 2018). I have not exited the academy or antiracist activism and it is unlikely that my departure (and that of other nonblacks) would be at all welcome or necessary to the health of Black autonomous struggle. However, this dissertation does attempt a Black autonomous analysis (Vargas 2018) of the current political moment in Austin, Texas and it is offered in the spirit of accompaniment to the Black Radical Tradition.

Towards this effort, I take up Joy James' classification of Black Feminist politics (James 1999) and Safiya Bukhari's insistence on the principled resolution of contradictions (Bukhari 2010) as proto-insurgent analytic tools from which to avoid the ethnographic erasure of ontological Blackness (Saucier 2016) and canonical antiracism's denial of antiblackness (Vargas 2018). James argues that while the state's sustained counterrevolution is the greatest antagonist of antiracist struggle, attention must also be paid to the anti-radical and anti-revolutionary tendencies within antiracist social movements. She argues that it is difficult, but important work to delineate activists' relationship to the state because not all anti-racisms are, "equally ambitious or visionary in their confrontations with state dominance and in their demands and strategies for

[5] Assata Shakur, *Assata* (London: Zed Books, 1987), 180.

transforming society" (James, *Shadowboxing* 78). To resist the erasure of an insurgent Black politics we must delimit between what James identifies as liberal, radical, neoradical and revolutionary ideologies:

> Black feminisms that accept the political legitimacy of corporate-state institutional and police power but posit the need for humanistic reform are considered *liberal*. Black feminisms that view female and black oppression as stemming from capitalism, neocolonialism, and the corporate state are generally understood to be *radical*. Some black feminisms explicitly challenge state and corporate dominance and critique the privileges status of bourgeois elites among the "left"; those that do so by connecting political theory for radical transformation with political acts to abolish corporate-state and elite dominance are *revolutionary*. (Ibid. 79)

This dissertation seeks to similarly systematize local political ideologies into a typology of anti-racist/police accountability organizing in Austin, Texas. I will account for each groups' important contributions and critically engage our shortcomings and contradictions. Ultimately, I base my final analysis on the organization's relationship to the anti-black state, the non-black ally and Black autonomy.

LIMITATIONS

The first and perhaps most obvious limitation to this critical ethnographic study of the Black Lives Matter Movement is that was conducted by a white woman. Almost immediately I think of the meme circulated amongst some of my interlocutors on Facebook. The meme reads, "When White people try to give their opinion on how Black people should respond to this country's injustices." Below this text is a cartoon image of a young Black woman using one hand to cover the mouth of a young white woman (likely taken from a television program I am unfamiliar with). The person who originally circulated the meme before it went viral writes their own message, "Just so we're clear…Today ain't the fucking day…Tomorrow ain't looking good either…" In this

image, I hear the question one of my fellow activists posed to me while copwatching around west campus, “what right do you have to speak for or represent Black people?” If I could have another chance to answer their question I would say that Black studies does not give me permission to speak for anyone. What it does do is provide a theoretical framework for understanding how the world works. That being said, I think the question can be reformulated to look something like, what does it mean to be a white woman doing this work; why is a white woman critiquing her local BLMM; what is the role of white and non-black folks in Black Studies and Black social movements; or, more precisely, can there be a role for non-blacks?

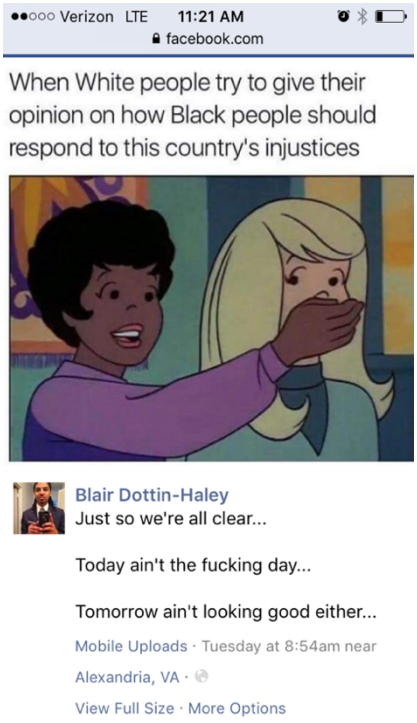


Figure 1.2 Facebook Meme on the irrelevancy of white thought to Black social movements

One way in which white and other nonblack women have navigated their position in Black Studies or authorized their fieldwork in Black communities is by claiming or performing a Black identity. I think for example of women such as Rachel Dolezal (now Nkechi Amare Diallo), Negin Farsad, or sociologist Alice Goffman. Goffman is particularly relevant seeing as the same copwatcher who raised the question of my place in Black Studies, made an immediate connection between Goffman and myself. She recommended I read Goffman's book, *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*. In the book's appendix, Goffman, then a white undergraduate, defends her ethnographic account of Black life in a hypersegregated Baltimore ghetto. Goffman legitimizes her qualitative data by emphasizing both her embeddedness and supposed embodiedness in the field. That is, Goffman operates from an understanding of participant observation as experiencing precisely what your subjects experience, "The method of participant observation involves cutting yourself off from your prior life and subjecting yourself as much as possible to the crap that the people you want to know about are being subjected to" (Goffman 242). She argues that part of her data is derived from her experience of performing Blackness and suffering antiblack trauma. Furthermore, her idea of "social shrinkage" or "becoming a fly on the wall" as an effective ethnographic technique to literally disappear herself from the field is equally disingenuous. Unlike Goffman, I do not understand my whiteness as something that can be disavowed or somehow rendered less present. I do not understand blackness and nonblackness as solely cultural identities that can be performed, but also as inescapable ontological positions (Saucier 2015).

Yet as much as I wish to distance myself from this desire to perform or inhabit blackness, throughout the text the reader will note that I uncritically use the language of we and our, à la Grace Lee Boggs, likely revealing my own unconscious desire to marshal the fungibility of blackness or at least disavow my place in an antiblack world. This implicit desire works against the truth of my ethnographic findings and the project's ultimate attempt to, "shit on the inspiration of the word we."[6] I hope my dissertation can write against the notion of an ethical or exceptional whiteness (Frankenberg 1993, Lipsitz 1998) and nonblackness (Prashad 2000, Dávila 2008, Jones 2010). This is the very dynamic of nonblack empowerment I have observed in Austin as part and parcel of anti-black terror. I do not want to contribute to yet another call for nonblack anti-racists. Totally the opposite. I want to show how anti-racism is a key factor in fortifying anti-blackness. In order to pre-empt the idea that somehow my dissertation serves as proof that nonblacks *are* educable and *can* recognize Black suffering I offer the following moments. Keep in mind how even the Black autonomist analytic allows me to do the this kind of energizing work.

December 2017: After asking my advisor several logistical questions about an upcoming job interview, I hold him hostage on the phone to criticize a town hall forum I had just attended after the recent bombings in Austin that killed Anthony Stephan House and Draylen Mason. At this event, cosponsored by Black movement leaders and the police department, white people were invited to hug the Black people present as a gesture of community healing (and this wasn't the first time I have been invited to do this in the

[6] I borrow this expression from Frank Wilderson

wake of antiblack terrorism). I was hoping to elicit shock or laughter, but he seems uninterested. I flashback to a time he casually invited me to revisit the story Baldwin tells about his 'friendship' with white writer Norman Mailer. Baldwin writes, "There is a difference between Norman and myself in that I think he still imagines that he has something to save, whereas I have never had anything to lose."[7] *I realize I may be similarly using my advisor to disavow my ontological position as a terrorist. Just as my fellow non-black activists show up in the hundreds to shout down a dozen Nazis at a "white lives matter" rally to claim an ethical non-blackness, so too do I show up to the field site, to engage (and mock) what I see as an unethical non-blackness and animate my own sense of exceptionality.*

October 2018: At an annual Black Studies conference, I hail a ride sharing service with fellow presenters and colleagues who are all Black. The driver of the car is a white woman. She asks us what the conference is about and there is a familiar pregnant pause. When one of us finally relents, and describes it as an African American history conference, this white Midwestern driver begins to free associate with the word African. "Our president's wife is in Africa today, with all the animals and children," her stream of consciousness begins. The tense car ride ends as we arrive at our destination and the driver offers a hearty, "Blacks matter!" to her passengers. As I laugh hard with my colleagues over this white woman's antiblackness and audacious butchering of the movement slogan, I find myself clinging to this moment of connection with Black

[7] As quoted by Frank Wilderson, *Red, White and Black* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 12.

scholars, desperately trying to ward off the knowledge that ontologically I cannot claim any meaningful difference from her.

All of this to say that no matter what my politics or methodological choices are, as a nonblack woman in the modern world, the antagonism of antiblackness is still at work in my activism and in this very ethnography.

The second limitation of this study is that to some extent, it lacks the voices of my interlocutors. This is partly due to my decision not to record interviews so as to protect my interlocutors' identities. I felt that as police accountability activists, they are vulnerable to surveillance and retaliation by the state. My decision not to record interviews was also based upon my interest in having candid dialogues and the knowledge that people tend to get uptight or performative when a Dictaphone is introduced into the conversation. I took detailed notes afterward each interview, although obviously, these notes do not capture the entire flavor of my interlocutors' speech. I also did not formally sit down with as many of my interlocutors as I would have liked to ask the *why* questions. In my defense, I think my ethnography does a good job of attending to the *how* of the BLMM in Austin, which may in fact be just as, if not more revealing. While not ideal, the small sample of interviews was not due to the limited interest of my interlocutors, but to my own time constraints as I juggled teaching assistantships, coursework, qualifying exams, a research assistantship, fieldwork, and dissertation writing.

Another possible limitation of this study is whether my representations of hegemonic antiracist praxis are complex and generous enough. A small aspect of this

may have to do with issues of access. I did not have access to Black Lives Matter Austin (BLM-A) and the Austin Accountability Alliance (AAA) leadership meetings. Nor did I ever attend AAA's private negotiations with city council members, the district attorney or the Austin Police Department. For example, I had no knowledge of the meeting that took place with initial BLM leaders before their joint press conference with Art Acevedo. Usually like other members of the organization, I would just hear about these happenings after the fact. On at least three occasions invitations were extended to me, but not followed up on, so I did not push for access. It is more likely that any nuance missing from my analysis is due to my failure to share and workshop the dissertation with more activist and academic colleagues prior to my defense. I hope that future versions of this document will include activists' extended responses to the arguments presented here along with their own interpretation of my fieldnotes.

DISSERTATION OUTLINE: "DOING THE WORK" WITH "THE MASTER'S TOOLS"

This dissertation explores the tension in Black political thought between redemptive and revolutionary frameworks for social change. The following study, the first ethnography of the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLMM), situates this longstanding debate within the context of our present moment. While policy makers and political theorists form a consensus that the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) holds the potential to perfect or radicalize U.S. democracy, they have not reckoned with an enduring and implicit antiblack bias. The lack of critical attention paid to how antiblackness operates within racial justice movements limits activists' capacity to create much needed transformative social change. In "Doing the Work" I address this gap in

research by conducting an activist ethnography of Black Lives Matter (BLM) organizing in Austin, Texas during the final year of the Obama presidency and the first year of the Trump administration.

In the following chapter, Chapter 1: On Lynchings examines the way in which members of the Black Lives Matter-Austin chapter abide by the commonsense antiracist praxis that displays of Black suffering will register nonblack recognition. As a result, we center the bulk of our movement work around nonblack witnessing. Largely informed by Saidiya Hartman and Christina Sharpe, I argued that while the commemoration of Black death is intended to elicit empathy or care, the staged intimacy between Black corpses and nonblack allies performs a psychic labor evocative of lynching. I name the banality of this move to recognize antiblackness—but only as a way to celebrate the nonblack ally- as "*vigil*ante racial justice." Chapter 2: A Seat at the Table is a case study of a grassroots campaign against the Austin police contract led by the Austin Accountability Alliance, a multiracial Black led group of police accountability lobbyists.[8] The campaign illustrates the ubiquity of a similar move: the willingness to recognize antiblack state violence, but only as evidence of democracy's eminence. This chapter similarly takes up the hegemonic antiracist notion that displays of Black suffering register state recognition and result in meaningful democratic reform. This chapter is also principally concerned with what movement strategies are rendered impossible by a politics of fulfillment. Chapter 3 Policing the Police is ethnographic case study of the Watchdogs, an Austin-

[8] This is a pseudonym

based cop-watching collective.[9] In this chapter I examine the current trend among BLM scholars that rewrites the Black Radical Tradition as a way to recuperate historical materialism. I also propose that as cop-watchers, we may be engaged in something similar: taking up Black radical forms, but distorting them or emptying them for projects that ultimately are not liberatory for the Black diaspora. I find that both these trends in scholarship and activism illustrate an anxiety toward the Black revolutionary subject/vanguard.

Chapter 4 "Without Sanctuary: Towards a Theory of Relationality" is ethnographic case study of the rise of the sanctuary movement and family separation crisis. I attend to how these mobilizations denouncing the state's racially targeted surveillance, capture, and dispossession of immigrant families (and in central Texas this was read largely as latinx) articulate a relationship to the BLM movement. What I found was that the war on the Black family either remained entirely unthought, or, Black suffering was analogized and subsumed within other forms of social suffering. By way of my ethnographic vignettes, what I'm calling for is a moratorium on this move to analogize the afterlife of slavery. Instead I propose that we identify the processes and institutions involved in the family separation crisis as inherently antiblack. This does not mean downplaying the suffering and experiences of other latinx immigrants (or other groups). Instead, it acknowledges the transgenerational vulnerability to dispossession as a definitive aspect of slavery and its afterlife and the way that the Black family has long been the antifamily. Finally, the conclusion suggests that it is Black anger, and not the

[9] This is also a pseudonym

Sisyphean model of Black love/forgiveness, that offers the most compelling speculative work for the future of Black Studies and Black movements.

Through an exploration of vigils, city council meetings, cop watches, and sanctuary movement rallies this dissertation presents a predictable pattern wherein antiblack violence is recognized (by the state and the coalition), but only in comfortable or self-affirming ways. Again and again I observed nonblack empathy turn to self-congratulation, small concessions from city officials become huge celebrations, and mass outrage directed at the family separation crisis mutate into the disavowal the war being waged against Black families. Additionally, I noticed a tendency among organizers to police radical and revolutionary political desire, no matter how benign or incipient. In other words, this study examines how an enduring and antiblack unconscious operates in movement spaces regardless of our politics and intentionality. The portrait of hegemonic antiracist praxis presented here suggests that the master's tools (Lorde 1979) presenting the greatest danger to Black Liberation are not autonomy and self-defense, but rather the politics of recognition, intersectionality and historical materialism. Ultimately this dissertation argues the BLMM is counter-revolutionary because it relies on canonical antiracist praxis that does not adequately account for antiblackness and adopts the same directive of the state, "that no black suffering warrants rebellion."[10] At its most conservative, this dissertation urges Black Studies and movements to question the master's tools of antiracism and develop an awareness of intramovement policing. At its

[10] Joy James, *Seeking the Beloved Community* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013), Kindle Locations 2695-2699.

most imaginative, it invites the Black diaspora to abandon antiracism and turn towards Black autonomist theorists and the project of anti-antiblackness.

Chapter 1: On Lynchings

INTRODUCTION

During BLM-A's monthly meeting Joan[11] facilitates a discussion between about thirty people that lasts roughly two hours. Aside from Black leadership, attendance is made up almost exclusively of brand new non-black (but overwhelmingly white) faces. Joan asks everyone to introduce themselves and share their definition of allyship. People relish the opportunity to speak their mind. They approach Joan's question earnestly. There is a concern with the "cheapness" of allyship, but also an overwhelming sense of its concreteness. In relation to Blackness, allyship is "listening to" and "believing" Black knowledge; "following Black leadership;" "showing up" to meetings or nonviolent direct actions; and otherwise "doing the work." In relation to non-blackness allyship is educative. Our discussion largely centers the pain of loving our racist neighbors, colleagues, friends and family members. We explore a collective anxiety about how to effectively dialogue with them. So allyship is also predicated on difficult conversations that require courage and patience. The hope is that by challenging our loved ones, we can convert other nonblacks to the project of antiracism.

What are we to make of a Black Lives Matter meeting that is almost entirely white and designed as a meditation on non-black participation in the Movement for Black Lives? Rather than a fluke occurrence, the gathering reflects the regular membership base and architecture of most assemblies, vigils, canvassings or direct actions in Austin, Texas. This chapter invites us to explore BLM-A's relationship to the ally and consider

[11] All the names of activists in this dissertation are pseudonyms.

why the ethical appeal to the non-black conscience is so central to the work of contemporary Black social movements. Despite the consensus we encounter in the meeting above, there is a longstanding debate among activists and scholars over whether bearing witness to Black suffering facilitates *the recognition,* or, *obliteration* of Black humanity. Similarly contentious is the enduring conversation around what, *if any*, is the role of nonblacks in the struggle for Black liberation?[12] This chapter's ethnographic case study of Black Lives Matter Austin, based on 24 months of activist fieldwork, looks at these debates in the context of the current political moment, and ultimately unsettles the supposedly transformative power of bearing witness to Black pain. To do so, I organize the chapter around three ethnographic scenes of Black Lives Matter actions that are representative of the now hegemonic Civil Rights' project of nonblack empathy and its profound inability to protect Black life.

First, I recount the day I spent in Bastrop, Texas with two other white Black Lives Matter Activists attending the trial of former deputy Daniel Willis for the murder of Yvette Smith. While I voice a discomfort with our voyeurism, my fellow white allies reassure me that by bearing witness to the trial I am educating myself and thus doing the work of an ally. Using James Baldwin's thesis in *The Fire Next Time*, I demonstrate how at first glance, with the commonsense tools of antiracist theory, the Black Lives Matter court watch is easily read as a transformative act of education and love. Next, I draw the reader's attention to the way the pain of Smith and her family occasions white

[12] Thanks to Dr. João Costa Vargas for helping change the question from what is the role, to wondering if there is indeed a role to be had.

introspection, white pain and an exploration of the radical capacity of whiteness. I find that the court-watch masks a fundamental unwillingness to account for the afterlife of slavery and organize accordingly. While my interlocutors read these scenes as acts of nonblack care, I propose they are better understood as *scenes of subjection* (Hartman 1997), that is, moments of antiblack violence and domination. Rather than thinking of nonblack witnessing as a commitment to love, I propose that the BLM-A legal observer is a position motivated by fear--the fear of Black self-defense.

Second, I tell the story of BLM-A's first annual trek to the Waller County Sheriff's department where we hold a vigil to remember and condemn the murder of Sandra Bland. I am surprised when we only spend 11 seconds in silence to dwell on Bland's murder. I turn to Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake* to challenge Black movements and Black Studies to do exactly what those participating in the trek hope to avoid: to assume a prolonged and critical engagement with the epistemic and material terms of Black suffering. Like Hartman's critique of witnessing, Sharpe's proposal for *wake work* is motivated by a concern with distinguishing care from violence. For me, our earnest, multiracial, antiracist vigil and the sadistic state sanctioned white lynch mob, though massively different, both pose a question about the way Black death energizes nonblack identities, loyalty to the antiblack state and negrophobic fantasy; both suggest Black diaspora dreamwork can never be engaged in Black self-defense. To push this troubling Venn diagram to its limits, I put David Marriott's psychoanalytic theorization of lynching in conversation with João Vargas's critique of what he names the Black cyborg, as well as Joy James's careful study of the Beloved Community.

Third, I end the chapter by remembering a speech given by Sandra Bland's mother, Ms. Geneva Reed-Veal, on the steps of the Texas Capital to a multiracial crowd of BLM activists. We were gathered to mark the anniversary of Bland's murder. Ms. Reed-Veal's address paradoxically begins by offering her daughter's death up as an opportunity for white redemption, and then concludes by referring the audience to the Turner Rebellion as a model for avenging her family's dispossession. I propose this divergence from the script of white ignorance/innocence and Black forgiveness invites the following questions: What would it mean for Black social movements to acknowledge that Black suffering is inaudible and illegible to civil society/non-blacks?[13] And, what if Black social movements saw the nonblack "what-can-*we*-do" question as a distraction from their work and treated it accordingly?[14] I hypothesize that this approach could raise the possibility of re-orienting movement work away from non-black potentiality and allow for an alternative place from which to defend the dead, the dying, and the vulnerable. Finally, I return to Sharpe's proposal for wake work and offer some examples of its political possibilities from the last time the U.S. Black middle class began organizing against state violence.[15] Finally, I introduce the following chapter and the similar questions it raises about the state's non/recognition of black suffering.

---

[13] I thank Dr. Simone Browne for directing me to this question in Nicholas Brady's "Louder than the Dark." See Brady, Nicholas, "Louder than the Dark," *The Feminist Wire*, October 11 2012, https://thefeministwire.com/2012/10/louder-than-the-dark-towards-an-acoustics-of-suffering/.

[14] I borrow this idea of distraction from Rigby and Zayid, however I want readers to make the distinction between antiblackness and white supremacy. See Rigby, Kevin and Hari Zayid, "White People Have No Place in Black Liberation," *RaceBaitR*, March 31 2016, http://racebaitr.com/2016/03/31/white-people-no-place-black-liberation/#.

[15] João Costa Vargas challenged me to think about the relationship between these moments in history.

CARAVAN TO BASTROP COUNTY COURTHOUSE: #J4YVETTESMITH

Yvette Smith 47, was a mother of two sons (18 and 25) and worked as a caretaker at the Austin State Hospital (a poorly maintained psychiatric institution just a block away from my apartment). On the night of February 16, 2014 Smith was at home with her partner, Willie Thomas. An argument took place between him and his son. She called 911. By the time Deputy Daniel Willis arrived, the argument was over. Willis, positioned behind his SUV, aimed his personal AR-15 semi-automatic rifle at Yvette's front door. Willis shouted "POLICE!" and within two seconds, as Smith opened the door to her home he fatally shot her twice. Willis was subsequently fired from the sheriff's office and tried for Smith's murder. After 20 hours of deliberation the jury deadlocked 8-4 in favor of guilty. Willis elected for a judge to preside over his retrial.[16]

On Facebook, BLM-A proposed a "caravan for justice" to the Bastrop County Courthouse for the first day of Willis' second trial. The event description read, "Yvette Smith was killed by Deputy Daniel Willis on February 16, 2014 in Bastrop, Texas. Join our "caravan for justice" to Bastrop County Courthouse, 804 Pecan Street, Bastrop, Texas 78602 at 9:00 AM. There will be no jury present, but the judge in this case will be issuing the ruling on Willis' trial. Be there to demand justice for Yvette Smith. #BlackWomenMatter #J4YvetteSmith." I post an offer to drive activists on the discussion board, but when no one responds, I head to the event alone. Entering Bastrop I am struck by how small it is. This is not urban Austin, but a historic settler town surrounded by farms and highways. I park in front of the courthouse and walk around. I had imagined

[16] I'm not sure if this description is necessary to orient the reader, or just pornographic. Peace and Love El Henson thinks about antiblack state violence and its circulation/enjoyment as porn.

that we would be holding a vigil or rally outside, yet no one is there. Feeling lost, I enter the municipal building. I pass through security and then, the courtroom doors. There are not many people present and I do not see any BLM leadership. I sit down on a bench, prosecution side. Yvette Smith's son and other family members sit just a few rows ahead. It had not occurred to me that we would be watching the trial unfold.

The judge enters the room and the bailiff orders us to rise. I refuse to stand, but feel grateful no one notices. Eventually Alice, one of BLM-A's core members and former ally coordinator, sits down next to me. She is a white social worker in her early 40s and lives in Austin with her husband and their young daughter where she is active in her Unitarian church. During a recess Alice thanks me for coming and introduces me to Reverend Hope, a white Methodist pastor in her mid 30s. Reverend Hope wears a clerical collar and a button with Sandra Bland's picture. Alice explains that Reverend Hope has been instrumental in the movement protesting Bland's suspicious death in a Waller County jail and that the judge presiding over the Willis trial today is the very same judge who issued the not guilty verdict in the trial of Bland's arresting officer in Waller County.[17] *People begin to file back into the courtroom. We sit together.*

Special prosecutor Forrest Sanderson is a tall white man who wears cowboy boots under his suit. Despite the compelling, straightforward and horrific facts of the case his opening is subdued and hard to follow. On the other hand, the defense is acerbic and presents a clear argument, echoing the same narrative of the sheriff department's

[17]Former officer Brian Encinia pulled Sandra Bland over for a failure to signal, a non-jail-able offense. Instead of issuing her a ticket, Encinia threatened to taze Bland, forced her to exit her vehicle and tackled her to the ground. He proceeded to arrest her for assaulting an officer. Unable to pay bail, Bland spends 3 days in jail and is found dead in her cell. I will review more details of her case in the following section.

initial press release, despite its factual inaccuracies. That is, they first present the predictable claim that Yvette Smith was armed and failed to comply with police orders. Second, they blame Smith's own family for her death. Lawyers introduce former deputy Willis' dash camera recording into evidence. We listen to the sounds of Smith's murder. Her family is visibly traumatized. Her mother eventually leaves. Even though Willis shot Smith within two seconds of her opening the door to her home, we listen to hours of testimony describing all the things he supposedly witnessed in these two seconds that made him fear for his life. At various points during the day we recess. During one break, I leave to get coffee. When I return, I come across Reverend Hope filming herself on her phone. Tears run down her face as she speaks to the difficulty of watching the trial and ***the duty of bearing witness****.*

When I encounter Alice again at a protest a few months later, I confess to feeling ambivalent at best and guilty at worst for our voyeurism-cum-activism. It was this feeling that prevented me from attending the rest of the trial. I ask her what her impression had been. She had a radically different experience. Instead, Alice felt like ***our purpose there was to bear witness to the system and learn about how the process works.*** *Further, it was about building community because she tends to feel very isolated. Despite the level of her own political engagement, her husband refuses to get involved in local antiracist politics. She wishes she could share her activism with him, but he doesn't feel comfortable or even safe attending protests. She also can't share it with her extended family who is openly racist.*

STAY WOKE

"Now that you have been exposed. Now that you have become aware of issues of police violence in our community. I need you to stay aware. I need you to behave like you're aware, I need you to stay woke. Get woke and stay woke."

Brittney Packet, *Stay Woke*

What are we to make of Alice and Reverend Hope's claim about the importance of bearing witness to Black suffering? Their interpretation of our court-watching experience represents an assumption at the heart of canonical antiracist praxis: that Black liberation necessitates raising white consciousness. One of the most significant contributors to this project of white awakening is Black political theorist James Baldwin.[18] In what may be Baldwin's most revered text, *The Fire Next Time* (hereafter *Fire*), he puts forward a thesis that operates in our contemporary moment as common sense among both scholars and activists. That is, antiblackness can be solved by Blacks lovingly and patiently helping whites confront their racism. In, "My Dungeon Shook," the first of the volume's two essays, Baldwin crafts an appeal to Black youth as a letter to an imaginary nephew, "James," on the 100th anniversary of emancipation. The letter begins as a reflection on the condition of continued captivity within the Northern ghetto. Baldwin characterizes the creation and maintenance of the ghetto as a state sanctioned genocidal plot. Then, Baldwin instructs this younger generation on how to respond to the enormity of such a crime and its subsequent disavowal. He starts by ordering "James" not to internalize the antiblack animus of white society, and not to become "bitter."

---

[18] For extended engagement with Baldwin's political desire for integration in *Fire* see Vargas, João, *The Denial of Antiblackness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018) and Vargas, João and Joy James, "Refusing Blackness and Victimization" in *Pursuing Trayvon Martin*, ed. George Yancy and Janine Jones (Lantham: Lexington Books, 2013).

Bitterness is Baldwin's shorthand for a non-canonical tradition in Black political thought which not only names antiblack terrorism, but defends against it with counterviolence.[19] Baldwin's political desire for integration is distinct in that it imagines a reconciliation between a genocidal state/civil society and a genocided people. In his own words,

> And if integration means anything, this is what it means that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it. For this is your home, great men have done great things here, and will again, and we can make America what America must become.[20]

The essence of Baldwin's argument is that Black Liberation will be brought about by civic-minded Blacks demanding whites confront their complicity and fraudulent know nothingness. If this theory of transformative social change was an equation it would look something like **Black appeal + white self-confrontation + Black forgiveness = integration.**

Baldwin's missive to "James" is of course also directed to whites. In fact, it models the very approach to antiracism he is proposing. In other words, returning to our equation above, *Dungeon* functions as a seductive appeal to the white conscience. First, it explains the material conditions of antiblackness, thus inviting a confrontation with Black suffering. Next, comes the painful awakening to one's collaboration with state violence, and finally, it promises redemption. Much like the white reader of *Fire,* the white women at the Bastrop County courthouse bear witness to the *utterly gratuitous* violence of the United States, its institutions, and collective unconscious. As court-watchers, we sit and

---

[19] I borrow this concept of counter-violence from Joy James. See James, Joy, *Seeking the Beloved Community* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013): 175.
[20] Baldwin, James, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage International, 1963): 10.

listen to the a ritual in which the state and the criminal justice system met out a death sentence for a family argument, whereas former deputy Willis is transformed into a brave soldier who's "mistakes" (the murder of Yvette Smith) are above reproach from "worthless critics" (the movement for Black Lives).[21] We witness the terror of justifiable homicide (Newton 1973), of a legal lynching (Shakur 1987)— and how anyone who passes the civil service exam today can kill Yvette Smith tomorrow with impunity (Jackson 1972). Which is to say we (nonblack witnesses) learn that for Black communities, the police and the courts operate as criminal networks. They are violent and shameless institutions that hold a monopoly on violence and absolutely no moral authority. In the words of Anthony Bell, one of Smith's sons, 'The proof is in the pudding, police will never get in trouble. They don't give a damn about us, us as in black people."[22]

Remember that for Baldwin, whites are facing what we already know, but disavow. For example, the BLM court-watchers know that in Austin, over the past 5 years, there have been 25 grand juries, but only one indictment which was ultimately dismissed.[23] In Houston, Harris County grand juries have not indicted an officer in almost 20 years. And until 2014 Dallas grand juries went 40 years without criminally charging a

---

[21] Dart, Tom, "Former Texas officer who fatally shot unarmed woman found not guilty," *The Guardian*, April 8 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/apr/07/fdaniel-willis-not-guilty-fatal-police-shooting-yvette-smith-texas.

[22] Szathmary, Zoe, "Texas ex-deputy is found NOT guilty in unarmed woman's shooting death on porch," *Daily Mail*, April 8 2016, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3530696/Texas-ex-deputy-NOT-guilty-unarmed-woman-s-shooting-death-porch.html.

[23] As I write my dissertation, the newly elected DA Margaret Moore of Waco, Texas is petitioning the US Supreme court to review the case against Detective Charles Kleinert who killed Larry Jackson Jr. in 2013. Moore wants to re-impose the indictment against Kleinert.

police officer for murder.[24] However for Baldwin, and others, there is something potent about our bearing witness firsthand to this conspiracy and the suffering of the Smith family that snaps us out of our denial and energizes us to commit more fully to the movement for Black lives. Take for example how Rev. Hope continues her ministry—especially her work with educating fellow whites. Alice continues to dialogue with her extended family and church members on matters of antiblack racism; show up for protests and city council meetings on issues of police brutality; and becomes one of the leading Austin organizers in the movement to indict Waller County for the death of Sandra Bland. I too continue my antiracist work as the BLM-A ally coordinator. This seems to evidence that yes, bearing witness to Black pain *can* transform the nonblack party and generate a moral awakening.

Political Scientist Stephen Marshall draws our attention to the way the political actors of Baldwin's liberatory project (consciousness raisers like Joan, Alice, and Reverend Hope) are described as lovers. According to Marshall, Baldwin's political practice of love requires showing, "the face of the beloved to himself or herself, love is, therefore, an activity of revelation, an activity in which the lover discloses himself or herself to the beloved as a condition of pushing the beloved to self-disclosure."[25] In "Down at the Cross," the second and final essay in *Fire*, Baldwin adopts this rhetorical strategy of revelation again by translating Black anger to a white readership. The essay

[24] Dexheimer, Eric, "Indictments in Police Shooting Rare; Convictions, Even Rarer," *Austin American Statesman*, May 12 2014, https://www.statesman.com/news/20140512/indictments-in-police-shooting-rare-convictions-even-rarer?__federated=1.

[25] Marshall, Stephen H., "The City on the Hill from Below," (Philadelphia: Temple University, 2012), Kindle Locations 2269-2270.

attempts to render Black fear and distrust of whites as a legible and wholly reasonable response to the machinations of white power. The title of the book functions as a warning. In Baldwin's words,

> If we- and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create the consciousness of the others – do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country and change the history of the world. If we do not now dare everything, the fulfillment of that prophecy, re-created from the Bible in song by a slave, is upon us: God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No water, the fire next time![26]

In essence, Baldwin argues that if whites do not enlist in the project of antiracism they risk extinction at the hands of Black insurgents. That is, if the multiracial coalition is not formed to redress the racial nightmare of antiblackness, the alternative is Black revolution. I quote this passage at length to demonstrate that in Baldwin's schema, the BLM-A caravan for justice is an expression of 'love' and a rejection of Black rage. According to Baldwin's now hegemonic framework, the Black women who organized the court watch and who brought this and other murders to our attention; who assign us movies to watch and books and articles to read; or the Black families of the deceased who allow white folks to join hands with them in a prayer circle or break bread with them in front of their homes; these Black activists are committing themselves to a project of white political education instead of Black insurgency.[27]

---

[26]Baldwin, *Fire*, 105.

[27] Notably our court watch and the way it energizes a political ethic of white redemption (instead of Black revolution) echoes the very origin story of the Black Lives Matter Movement. That is, when three Black women came together after watching the Zimmerman trial, and dedicated themselves to the task of bringing about a national reckoning with Black suffering instead of plotting an uprising.

All of this to say that at first glance, with the now common sense tools of antiracist theory, the Black Lives Matter court watch is easily read as a transformative act of education and love. My intent now is to examine and account for the possibility that this might also be a moment of violence and domination. Of course, some readers may object to this non-canonical line of inquiry, but I ask that they allow themselves, if just for a moment, to consider that there may be an alternative way to think about this ethnographic vignette. I ask, does the act of three white women watching Judge Lynch torture Yvette Smith's family raise our consciousness as allies? Or is it a refusal to position ourselves ontologically, along the power relations of slavery? Is it an act of love? Or is it a preference for state violence? Is this form of allyship liberatory or antiblack?

THE CRISIS OF WITNESSING

In her paradigm shifting book, *Scenes of Subjection,* historian and literary scholar Saidiya Hartman argues that the Atlantic slave trade brought about a *crisis of witnessing*. Hartman's time spent in the archive of slavery and thus her relentless encounters with scenes of torture, lead her to argue that, "to be a slave is to be under the brutal power and authority of another."[28] In other words, Hartman asserts that the fundamental violation of slavery, was not forced labor, but the *parasitism* (Patterson 1982) of the Human upon the slave. Hartman contends that the terror of this object status is such that that even abolitionists, those who sought to recognize the humanity of the enslaved, tended to implicitly take hold of the captive body as a cognitive conductor for self-revelation. As

[28] Quoted in Hartman, Saidiya, *Scenes of Subjection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.

evidence of this slippage, Hartman examines the letters abolitionist John Rankin wrote to his slave holding brother. Rankin's letters, like Baldwin's, attempt to describe the indescribable, such as the coffle, in order to elicit a confrontation with Black pain and inspire a moral awakening. By way of denaturalizing Black suffering, Rankin projects himself and his family onto the enslaved. In doing so he admits, "I began in reality to feel for myself, my wife, and my children..."[29] For Hartman, Rankin's fantasy speaks to the inability of the captive body to arouse empathy. She writes,

> […] the humanity extended to the slave inadvertently confirms the expectations and desires definitive of the relations of chattel slavery. In other words, the ease of Rankin's empathic identification is as much due to his good intentions and heartfelt opposition to slavery as to the fungibility of the captive body.[30]

Here we can see how paradoxically, bearing witness to Black suffering under slavery (even when it causes outrage rather than pleasure) renders the enslaved into psychic fuel that vivifies white personhood. Despite Rankin's intentions, his exercise in empathy effaces the enslaved and functions instead as a mirror for himself. Whether through torture or its recounting, the body of the enslaved remains the (material/psychic) property of whites to use at will.

While some may object that it would be ahistorical to apply the crisis of witnessing outside the historical confines of slavery, Hartman reminds us of the ways that emancipation and its bestowal of personhood concomitantly facilitates a re-entrenchment and intensification of Black subjection. Remember too, that 126 years following emancipation, Baldwin similarly insists, "You know, and I know, that the country is

---

[29] Hartman, *Scenes*, 18.
[30] Ibid 19.

celebrating one hundred years of freedom one hundred years too soon."[31] Suspending a disbelief in what Christina Sharpe calls slavery's continued unfolding, we might ask, how does the crisis of witnessing operate in the present? Martin Luther King's *Where do we go from here? Chaos or Community* offers us an example of the now hegemonic idea that white encounters with Black suffering will galvanize transformative social change. King writes,

> It is impossible for white Americans to grasp the depths and dimensions of the Negro's dilemma without understanding what it means to be a Negro in America. Of course it is not easy to perform this act of empathy. Putting oneself in another person's place is always fraught with difficulties. Over and over again it is said in the black ghettos of America that 'no white person can ever understand what it means to be a Negro.' There is a good reason for this assumption. For there is very little in the life and experience of white America that can compare to the curse this society has put on color. And yet, if the present chasm of hostility, fear and distrust is to be bridged, the white man must begin to walk in the pathways of his black brothers and feel some of the pain and hurt throb without letup in their daily lives.[32]

Working under the assumption that antiblack animus comes from a profound ignorance about the lived reality of Blackness, King beckons whites like Alice, Reverend Hope and myself to perform Rankin's almost 200-year-old fantasy.[33] However, in light of Hartman's critique, this affective labor reveals the illegibility of Black suffering. For slave masters or abolitionists, racists judges and cops or antiracists court watchers, Black pain is still a mirror. This atemporal move, this leap, operates regardless of intentionality. For the judge and cop (the jury and executioner), Smith's murder and the subsequent

---

[31] Baldwin, *Fire*, 10.

[32] King Jr, Martin Luther, *Where Do We Go from Here?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), Kindle Locations 1593-1596.

[33] For critiques of this assumption see Alves, Jaime Amparo and João Costa Vargas, "On Deaf Ears," *Identities* 24, 3 (2017) and Jung, Moon-Kie, *Beneath the Surface of White Supremacy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

torture of her surviving family members, buoys their dominion as nonblacks/agents of the state. For Alice and Reverend Hope, Smith's murder and the subsequent torture of her family, animates a shared grief over *our own* pain. We reflect on the agony of being a witness to antiblack state violence and the difficulty in feeling distant from or discord with one's kin or religious community. The court-watch also energizes our sense of potentiality and exceptionality as nonblack allies in the movement for Black lives, as white women who are willing to educate ourselves and others. I argue then that both the killing of Yvette Smith and the trial of Deputy Willis are best understood as scenes of subjection. Or in Hartman's words, the humanity we extended to Yvette Smith and her family at the court watch inadvertently confirms the expectations and desires definitive of the relations of chattel slavery. Therefore, once we understand that Black death compulsively occasions white introspection, white pain, and an exploration of the radical capacity of whiteness, Baldwin's equation (Black appeal + white self-confrontation + Black forgiveness = integration) loses its liberatory potential, and instead, presents a profound danger to Black communities.

WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

As I noted in the earlier discussion of canonical antiracism, when Baldwin and King write their respective letters to Black social movements in the late 1960s, they present Black youth and potential white allies with a choice between love or hate. Here is the choice in Baldwin's words, "If we do not dare everything, the fulfilment of that prophecy, re-created from the Bible in song by a slave is upon us: God gave Noah the

rainbow sign, no more water, the fire next time."[34] Similarly King writes, "We still have a choice today: nonviolent coexistence or violent coannihilation. This may well be mankind's last chance to choose between chaos or community."[35] At closer examination, the choice between water or fire, chaos or community, reads as explicit warning to whites: If you do not whole heartedly confront your participation in this domestic war against Black communities, the dialectic is such that conditions of slavery will produce Black insurgency. You can repent and become an antiracist in the "Bloodless Revolution" of love agape, or you can face your fate under Black revolution. In the current movement-moment we stand at a similar crossroads. Uprisings in Ferguson, Baltimore and the less covered eruptions in Milwaukee and elsewhere pose King's unanswered question, where do we go from here? Without a second thought the BLM-A court watch organizers and participants take up the mantle of antiracism as if it is the only game in town.[36] To King's question, we answer in unison–*not* black revolt. Which is to say that we prefer state violence to the violence of Black self-defense.[37] Otherwise, why not convict former deputy Willis ourselves?

For the ally "showing up" and "doing the work" of consciousness raising/witnessing masks a fundamental unwillingness to account for the afterlife of slavery and then organize accordingly. Alice, Reverend Hope and myself may be willing to concede Baldwin's thesis that forms of captivity have mutated, but remain. Yet, we

---

[34] Baldwin, *Fire*, 105.
[35] King, *Where do we go*, Kindle Locations 2798-2799.
[36] The idea of "the only game in town" is one I borrow from conversation with João Costa Vargas
[37] I borrow the idea of our unconscious preference for "the violence of the state as opposed to the violence of Blacks," from Frank Wilderson, *Red, White and Black* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) 132.

refuse to organize in what Wilderson calls a, "politically masochistic manner."[38] Such nonblack political masochism would go against, "the concreteness of their own communities, their own families, and themselves, rather than against the abstraction of 'the system,'" and against subjectivity itself.[39] Our tactics and strategies reflect this cognitive dissonance. We do not want to position ourselves ontologically, nor do we want Black insurgents to do so. Acknowledging the crisis of witnessing is not to say that the abolitionist or civil rights movements were not hard fought and hard won political struggles.[40] What I am trying to get at rather, is how the common-sense antiracism of BLM-A does not account for what Hartman elsewhere calls *the demands of the slave on the present*.[41]

[38] Wilderson, Frank, "Biko and the Problematic of Presence," in *Biko Lives*,! ed. Andile Mngxitama, Amanda Alexander and Nigel C. Gibson (London: Palgrave, 2008).
[39] Ibid.
[40] Although plenty of scholarship has questioned the nature of such wins, in particular, see Hartman, *Scenes* and Bell, Derrick, *Silent Covenants* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[41] Hartman, Saidiya, *Lose Your Mother* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2008), 170.

Figure 2.1

William Hackwood (died 1836). *Medallion*, after 1786.
Tinted stoneware, 1 1/4 x 1 1/4 in. (3.2 x 3.2 cm).
Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Emily Winthrop

Original Author unknown, 1831
Woodcut
University of Virginia Special Collections

In her memoir, *Lose Your Mother*, Hartman argues that reparations, which she defines as the move to display evidence of slavery's transgenerational toll on the African-descended (the struggle for institutional redress), requires that Black movements: 1) situate slavery in the past; and 2) stage a scene of subjection. She presents Joseph Wedgwood's medallion, popular among abolitionists in the 1780s and 90s, as an example of what she finds, "innately servile" about the Black appeal to the nonblack conscience.[42] The medallion (pictured above) suggests that the struggle for freedom is waged on bended knee, feet and hands shackled, but clasped in prayer. Hartman writes, "the apologetic density of the plea for recognition is staggering."[43] The struggle for freedom for abolitionists then is a plea for mercy, the act of begging for one's life. The medallion grants the abolitionist and their slave holding counterparts the power to decide who lives and who dies. If the enslaved's desire for freedom is the political desire for nonblack

[42] Ibid 166.
[43] Ibid 169.

recognition and integration, dominion remains in their grasp.[44] What the medallion distorts is the enslaved's recorded orientation toward freedom—which was decidedly not an apologetic appeal, but the utter refusal of the master slave relation. The medallion/abolition erases a well archived, and much feared Black radical tradition of marronage, revolt, and revolution.[45] How does the BLM-A court-watch function similarly? First, it operates from a paradigm where slavery is in the past, at least to the extent that we do not have to locate ourselves in is power relations. Second, the court-watch, and the antiracist project to educate ourselves and our communities, grants us a similar power to pardon. Black liberation is up to us. Therefore, we keep our sovereign position (without the pain of acknowledging this). Like the medallion, and its contemporary instantiations ("hands up don't shoot" comes to mind), the court-watch disavows the knowledge that freedom isn't asked for, it's taken.[46]

Despite our intentions, the court-watch as well as the larger project of nonblack consciousness raising, is ultimately a counterrevolutionary project. They are both a *distortion* of the enslaved's demands on the present as we explored above, but they are also a *distraction* that functions as a serious diversion from and hindrance to Black liberation.[47] As Toni Morrison argues,

---

[44] I borrow the idea of dominion from Hartman, Saidiya, "On Whiteness: A Symposium at the Kitchen," Lecture, New York, June 30 2017, https://vimeo.com/279666924.

[45] See James, C.L.R, *A History of Pan African Revolt* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012); Robinson, Cedric, *Black Marxism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983) and Horne, Gerald, *The Counter-Revolution of 1776* (New York: NYU Press, 2014).

[46] Hartman, *Lose*, 169.

[47] For the argument that mobilizing protests around incidents of violent and/or lethal antiblack policing is a distraction from Black liberatory politics that disavows antiblackness see Sexton, Jared and Steve Martinot, "The Avant," *Social Identities* 9, 2 (2010); Vargas, João Costa and Joy James, "Refusing Blackness-as-

> The function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over-and-over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language, so you spend twenty something years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn't shaped properly, so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Somebody says you have no art, so you dredge that up. Somebody says you have no kingdoms, so you dredge that up. None of that is necessary. There will always be one more thing.[48]

While Morrison employs the vocabulary of racism, one that this dissertation eschews for antiblackness, I want to direct the reader's attention to the common thread between our emerging critique of antiracist consciousness raising and Morrison's analysis that, "educating the conqueror is none of our business."[49] As Morrison demonstrates, convincing nonblack people of Black humanity is not worthwhile, for nonblack potentiality is a never ending educative project that demands endless Black appeals. There will always be another state sanctioned murder that needs to be rendered legible to nonblacks as a crime. There will always be one more ally or potential ally that needs educating, soothing, directing, etc. This endless appeal, according to Hartman and Morrison, has *outlived its usefulness*.[50]

Surely at this point the reader is asking, if the caravan performs the violence of subjection (Hartman 1997) and distraction (Morrison 1975) from the urgency of the now, then what alternatives are there for antiracist practice?; What could Alice, Reverend Hope and myself have done instead of pulling up front row seats to the courtroom's

---

Victimization," in *Pursuing Trayvon Martin*, ed. George Yancey and Janine Jones (2014); Alves, Jaime Amparo and João Costa Vargas, "On Deaf Ears," *Identities* 24, 3 (2017); and Vargas, João, *The Denial of Antiblackness* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

[48] Morrison, Toni, "A Humanist View," Lecture, Portland State University's Black Studies Center Public Dialogue Part 2, Portland, 1975, https://www.mackenzian.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Transcript_PortlandState_TMorrison.pdf.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Hartman, *Lose*, 166.

demonstration of gratuitous violence, dispossession and dishonor?; or, What might antiracist allies do? For the moment ,I will push back a bit on the what-can-we-do question. As a TA for the UGS course Blackness and Mass Incarceration over the past three years, this is a question I hear often from my students in discussion sections. The very moment that we land on a troubling pattern and begin to name it, students immediately pivot away from the discomfort of this reality, its enormity, and our complicity with it. As a field, and as community activists, we are too quick to shift away from this discomfort. I propose that we need to dwell on it. We must stay with this process of naming and describing problems rather than jumping toward the comfort of the resolution--not as an exercise in criticism for its own sake, but because our current modes of analysis and organizing have not yielded an end to antiblack violence. For now I ask that the reader refrain from demanding an quick and easy resolution. Instead let us continue our line of inquiry into the way the crisis of witnessing takes place during our current political moment. As you read the following ethnographic vignette, pay attention to what forms of identity, loyalty and political desire the ally's intimacy with Black death energizes.[51]

ANNUAL TREK TO WALLER COUNTY

As a recent graduate of Prairie View A&M, a historically Black University in Waller County, Texas, Sandra Bland, 28, lived between Houston, Prairie View, and Illinois looking for work. Bland's unemployment was compounded by law enforcement's

[51] Dr. João Vargas suggested the term energized.

targeted policing in which minor traffic violations or marijuana possession charges kept Bland constantly burdened with an enormous amount of debt, warrants, court dates, and jail time. In 2015, she accepted a 4 week long low wage job at her alma mater. Although it was dependent on a background check which would probably have rendered her ineligible for the position.[52] *On Thursday July 10, 2015 Sandra signed her temporary contract at Prairie View. Just moments later on University Drive she was pulled over for, "failure to signal a lane change" by 30-year-old Brian Encinia. Encinia, a white Tejano state trooper, threatened to taze Bland unless she put out her cigarette and exit her car. When she obeyed his order, he proceeded to wrestle her to the ground and arrest her for this non-jailable offense along with the charge of, "assaulting a public servant." At Waller County Jail, neither Bland, nor the loved ones she called, could make the $550 bail. After 72 hours in solitary confinement Bland was found hanging in her cell. Her death was officially ruled a suicide. Officer Encinia was indicted for perjury to a grand jury, but ultimately the case was dismissed.*

A year after Bland's death, Black Lives Matter Austin posted an event on Facebook described as the first, "Annual Trek to Waller County." The advertisement read, "Sandra Bland was found hanged on July 13, 2015 after being wrongfully arrested by Officer Brian Encinia in Waller County, Texas. Join Black Lives Matter Austin and our allies in Waller County on the anniversary of Bland's transition. UPDATE: We will meet at the Carver Library at 9:30 AM for a short intro, logistics and will depart at 10

[52] See Nathan, Debbie, "What Happened to Sandra Bland?," *The Nation*, April 21 2016, https://www.thenation.com/article/what-happened-to-sandra-bland/.

AM. We will arrive in Waller County between the hours of 12 PM to 1 PM. Please inform us if you have space available in your car for transportation and bring flowers, cards, or candles to lay on site. We will then depart from Waller County at 3 PM."[53]

I meet Isaac, an Arab American man, Claire, a white Lutheran minister, and Joan of BLM-A leadership, in the parking lot of the George Washington Carver Library. Together we make up the first, "Annual Trek to Waller County." Isaac offers to drive our carpool. Once we arrive at the jail we park and meet a 60-year-old white woman from Galveston. We also link up with a white Australian woman from Austin and three folks from Houston: Casey, a queer Asian American undergraduate, Lena a young Black woman, and Emily, a white woman with a large professional grade camera. We apply sunscreen and wait for others to arrive until they don't. We missed the activists- mainly Black students from Prairie View A & M and Rev. Hope- who spent the past three nights holding vigil at the jail.

We gather around a car's open trunk and make protest signs: "White silence = Violence;" "What happened to Sandy?;" "Justice for Sandra Bland;" and "Black Lives Matter." We exchange Facebook friend requests. Claire points out that the paved parking lot and guard rails in front of the jail's doors are new since Sandra's murder. "They did it to lend legitimacy to the jail," she says. I notice that the parking lot is filled with new SUVs. One officer even rolls up in a pristine Mercedes Benz. Police with giant ten-gallon cowboy hats come out of the jail to move their cars that are parked near ours. They wave, greet us, and joke about the merciless lack of shade. Once everyone is done

[53] From the Annual Trek to Waller County Facebook Event Page, hosted by BLM-A.

making signs, we form a single line in front of the building and take several group pictures. Behind us reads, "Waller County Sheriff's Office and County Jail." Emily takes a few snaps, and I trade with her as a courtesy and do the same.

Joan says we'll have a saying of the names and a meditation for 11 seconds. She explains the 11 seconds represent the number of letters in Sandra Bland's name. We form a circle and hold hands. Joan says as many names of African Americans murdered by police as she can remember. She makes sure to mention the names of Black women too. She pauses, mentions a few more names, and stops again, self-conscious. Even though she has such a large catalogue of the dead committed to memory, "There are just so many that sometimes I forget." We bow our heads in silence for 11 seconds. Afterwards Joan goes into the jail to ask for a tour of the premises. Casey, Lena, Claire and the Australian woman join her.

Isaac, Emily, the older white woman from Galveston, and I stay outside. The four of us begin to discuss the current policing crisis. We exchange facts, statistics, murder cases, laws, etc.: "This goes beyond murders, it's the way these communities are policed;" Or, "We have twice the prison population of China and a quarter of their population;" and so on. Then we discuss the recent Black Lives Matter Dallas Protest where 25-year-old Micah Johnson, an army veteran, shot and killed five Dallas police officers. The woman from Galveston is disturbed by how the police utilized a bomb deploying robot to kill Johnson. She doesn't approve of police operating as, "judge, jury and executioner." Isaac vehemently disagrees with her. I motion to the flagpole in front of the jail, "How come we lower the flag for 5 people who died and not for the hundreds

killed by police?" "This year it was over 1,000," Emily corrects me. We get quiet. The rest of our group comes out of the jail chuckling. Apparently, they were not allowed to have a tour. Instead they lead the sheriff in an impromptu prayer circle.

STAY IN THE WAKE

I find it curious that a multiracial group of activists would drive almost two hours to reach Waller County, and yet allot only 11 seconds of silence to reflect on Sandra Bland's murder and the astounding number of deaths at the hands of law enforcement. In Texas alone, nearly 7,000 people have died in police or jail custody over the past decade--30% of whom were Black, more than twice their representation in the state.[54] We dwell on this enormous loss of Black life for less than a minute. Our 11 second wake gives way to either 1) a collective flexing of our comprehension of the policing crisis and a debate over whether the state has the right to kill Black rebels (with a robot) or not; or 2) an attempt the shame the shameless. I think it is important that I say this again, when faced with the enormity and banality of lethal antiblack policing we must almost immediately pivot toward a more comfortable psychic realm be it a mastery of the problem at hand and a disavowal of the need for Black self-defense; or an invitation to law enforcement to recognize and repent for perpetrating state violence. In other words, we can acknowledge antiblack violence- but only momentarily- and I mean literally, just for one moment. In the time it takes to inhale deeply through your nose and begin to empty your diaphragm

[54] Woog, Amanda, "Texas Custodial Death Report," *Texas Justice Initiative*, July 2016, http://texasjusticeinitiative.org/publications/.

through your lips we have already moved on. It is far too uncomfortable to stay with these deaths and what they may tell us about the world.

Those of us gathered in front of the Waller County Jail are not alone or unique in our refusal to engage in a prolonged meditation on the nature of Black suffering. In a conversation between Umi Selah of Florida's Dream Defenders and Charlie Cobb of SNCC about the current generation's answer to King's provocation, "*Where do we go from here*?," Selah's first point in a list of recommendations to activists is as follows, "We gotta move from being *more* organizers and *less* critics. So, more organizers and less critics."[55] His frustration lies with, "how pessimism has become rampant in our movement moment."[56] Or as Shaun, a leader from Austin's BLM movement moment often says, "less talk, more action." Shaun rejects what he sees as an impulse to overanalyze and needlessly critique local movement tactics and strategies.[57] He thinks Austin organizers should adopt a, "yes, and" approach, a kind of live and let live outlook that legitimizes all efforts, no matter how ideologically disparate, as contributing to a shared goal. Implied in the movement sayings of Selah and Shaun, and the exchange of facts about lethal policing and mass incarceration outside Waller County Jail, is the idea that Black organizers and their antiracist allies already understand the problem at hand. Further reflection on the policing crisis is not only unnecessary, but mires the urgency of now in self-aggrandizing debate or contrarianism. Organizers and action oriented folks in

---

[55] Umi Selah, "Where Do We Go From Here?," Lecture, SNCC Digital Gateway Project, Durham, March 24 2018, http://www.newblackmaninexile.net/2018/06/umi-selah-phillip-agnew-where-do-we-go.html.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Although he is quick to do this himself, as I explore in the following chapter.

Selah and Shaun's respective schemas move not against the state, like Johnson. Rather, like those of us who entered the jail—they engage in the methods of nonviolent direct action. I propose that our 11 second wake for Sandra Bland reflects a pervasive (but not totalizing) common sense among today's activists that there is *too much* critical thinking being done about the praxis of Black liberatory struggle.

This resistance to grappling with the evidence of antiblackness is also omnipresent in Black Studies spaces. During seminar discussions for an undergraduate general studies course on Blackness and Mass Incarceration I regularly encounter such unconscious opposition or even open hostility toward a sustained reflection on what the afterlife of slavery looks like in the current political moment. As I mentioned earlier, in these discussion sections, the moment we arrive at a pattern that reveals the scale and predictability of antiblackness, there arises a collective impulse among students to turn away from its horror, and find solace in generating quick, actionable forms of redress. In its most dramatic instantiation, students began to complain regularly during lectures that they "got it" and the continued examination of the mass incarceration crisis was just too "depressing." They demanded the professor provide solutions. Likewise, when I participated on a recent panel at a Black Studies conference, where presenters read papers that highlighted the workings of antiblackness in public schools, police accountability movement spaces, and pornography- I anticipated the resistance to thinking in depth about the specific antiblack logic I analyzed. I tried to preempt the brainstorming of immediate solutions or celebration of work that did not ultimately mitigate antiblack violence by inviting audience members to generate further examples of this logic. The

concern arose from the audience, however, that to do so, to stay there, would condemn Black scholars and activists to a paralysis so crippling that they would not be able to get out of the bed in the morning. Similarly, a prominent Black feminist theorist visiting the University of Texas at Austin organized their guest lecture around the idea that, "description is not liberation;" that efforts at more fully describing antiblack violence do not in fact contribute to a liberatory praxis. By way of these examples, I draw the reader's attention to the common place-ness of this idea that sustained reflection on antiblackness does not result in a greater understanding of how power structures the world, but rather works against, or, stifles Black radical dream work and on the ground resistance.[58]

Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake* presents a challenge to Black movements and Black Studies to do exactly what those participating in the trek hope to avoid; to assume a prolonged and critical engagement with the epistemic and material terms of Black suffering. For Sharpe, the wake is not what Brittany Packet described in an earlier epigraph as nonblacks waking up to the reality of antiblack policing and then joining police accountability efforts. In her words, "Now that you have been exposed. Now that you have become aware of issues of police violence in our community. I need you to stay aware. I need you to behave like you're aware, I need you to stay woke. Get woke and stay woke."[59] For Sharpe, the wake is not white or nonblack consciousness. The wake is the ontology of antiblackness inaugurated by slavery. Staying in the wake, that is, staying attuned or alive to slavery and *it's continued unfolding*, requires that activists and

[58] João Costa Vargas introduced me and my cohort to this pattern of resistance as he would point it out during our Black Studies Theory 1 seminar discussions in 2014.
[59] Washington, Jesse, *Stay Woke*, dir. Laurens Grant (2016; BET, 2018 Amazon).

scholars attend to 1) the specificity of Black communities' vulnerability to premature death and 2) understand their own position in the afterlife of slavery as one of either social death or dominion, as parasitic host or parasite.

Sharpe calls this form of Black resistance- one that acknowledges and moves against the catastrophe of antiblackness- *wake work*. Finding the ritual of the wake an instructive model for a liberatory praxis, she provides two dictionary definitions of the word:

> *Wake: a watch or vigil held beside the body of someone who has died, sometimes accompanied by ritual observance including eating and drinking*;" and "*Wake: grief, celebration, memory, and those among the living who, through ritual, mourn their passing and celebrate their life in particular the watching of relatives and friends beside the body of the dead person from death to burial and the drinking, feasting, and other observances incidental to this.*[60]

Sharpe writes of the wake she held with her loved ones for her second eldest brother, Stephen. Here, in the wake, Sharpe advocates for Stephen by believing his pain and working to ease his suffering. In the wake, she holds space to grieve her loved one taken too soon; celebrates the preciousness and irreplaceability of his life; and reflects on the power relations of slavery that have positioned herself and her family in the jaws of death. Significantly just as the wake-as-ritual takes place in community with the dead, the dying, and those assailed by death, so too does her proposal for *wake work* occur,

---

60 For Sharpe, wake work has to understand the totalizing ontology of social death as well as hold space and reverence for, "the resistance of the object" (Moten 2003) and, "the everyday practices of the dominated" (Hartman 1997). Wake work holds the tension of Black life lived under social death without sacrificing the grammar of anti-blackness.

"laterally, across a series of relations in the hold."[61] Which is to say that the "we" of Sharpe's text is Black and the project of wake work is a fundamentally Black project.

Like Hartman's critique of witnessing, Sharpe's proposal for wake work is motivated by a concern with distinguishing care from violence. On the one hand, Sharpe exposes the lie of benefactor-narratives around "disaster relief efforts" or children being "transferred into the care of the state" that brutally euphemize state terror. On the other hand, wake work is an attempt to recuperate the political possibility of care for the Black freedom movement. She describes her book project as follows,

> I want to think "care" as a problem for thought. I want to think care in the wake as a problem for thinking and of and for Black non/being in the world. Put another way, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* is a work that insists and performs that thinking needs care…and that thinking care need to stay in the wake."[62]

Note that this potentially liberatory praxis of care is not interested in salvaging the hegemonic multiracial formation tasked with raising nonblack awareness and then incorporating these potential allies into a nonviolent antiracist movement. Instead, it is a project of Black thought, Black consciousness and Black care. While the generative questions for BLM-A's antiracism seem to be how can we make nonblack people care?; How can nonblacks participate?; or, How can we get and keep nonblack folks woke? Staying in the wake, is a meditation on how Black people can best keep one another safe under conditions of war.[63] Wake work invites the Movement for Black Lives to carefully

---

[61] Sharpe, Christina, *In the Wake* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016) 113.
[62] Sharpe, *Wake*, 5.
[63] For authors who explore antiblackness as war, See Kelley, Robin, "Slangin' Rocks Palestinian Style," in *Police Brutality*, ed. Jill Nelson (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 2000); Patterson, William L., *We Charge Genocide* (New York: International Publishers Co., 1951); and Vargas, João Costa, *Never Meant to Survive* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2010).

reconsider our supposed grasp of "the problem" and the political common sense that scripts our solutions by posing the (re)orienting question, "What does it mean to defend the dead? To tend to the Black dead and dying: to tend to the Black person, to Black people, always living in the push toward our death?"[64] Although not generally acknowledged in the academic spaces that have rushed to embrace *In the Wake*, I read Sharpe as distinctly calling for a praxis of care as a praxis of Black self-defense.

If what is needed to keep Black communities safe is Black consciousness raising and Black care, then our wake work falls dramatically short. The wake that we hold for Sandra Bland is not thinking or practicing care through Sharpe's schema for we refuse to stay in the wake. In other words, we refuse to situate ourselves in the power relations of slavery and thus we refuse to recognize the necessity of Black self-defense. For me, our earnest, multiracial, antiracist vigil and the sadistic state sanctioned white lynch mob, though massively different, both pose a question about the way black death energizes, non-black identities, loyalty to the antiblack state and negrophobic fantasy; both suggest Black diaspora dreamwork can never be engaged in Black self-defense. [65]

THE RED RECORD CONTINUES

The growing accessibility of data on police shootings and in custody deaths, the virality of amateur videos capturing lethal policing, and the birth of the Black Lives Matter movement have unquestionably generated a growing awareness of state sponsored

---

[64] Sharpe, *Wake*, 10.

[65] As I will explore in much greater detail, these ideas come from my readings of Marriott, David, *On Black Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Alves and Vargas, "On Deaf Ears;" and Vargas, *Denial.*

anti-black violence in the U.S. There has also been an impulse and willingness to think of both the murders themselves as well as the circulation and consumption of the video-taped killings, as instances of modern day lynching.[66] I ask the reader to go one step further with this analogy. Is it possible for us to think of the BLM-A vigil as performing a similar psychic labor to that of lynching? First there are the more immediate, obvious parallels. Consider the pilgrimages BLM-A makes to the sites of contemporary southern horrors in Austin and throughout the state of Texas. We hold vigils in front of jails, in parking lots, apartment complexes, front yards, and on the side of the road. There are advertisements that announce the details of the event. We travel long distances, even making day long excursions to be in attendance. We take our picture in front of these sites of anti-black terror and then we post the images on social media platforms so that our loved ones can see the collective ritual that we performed around dead Black bodies. We carry signs with their names or their portraits. Sometimes we buy shirts with their picture on it so that we can take a piece of them home with us. Or we hold on to them by memorizing and invoking their names. Afterwards we share snacks, sometimes sitting down for a meal or a drink. Yet I am less concerned with the performative similarities of these rites than with the parallel psychic procedures they animate. Let us examine the most profound differences between the social formation of the vigilante mob and that of the BLM-A vigil that potentially threaten this comparative possibility.

---

[66] See "Report of U.N. Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent," *UN Human Rights Council*, August 18 2016, https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/183/30/PDF/G1618330.pdf?OpenElement ; and Smith, Christen, *AfroParadise* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

First, the lynch mob is a group of racist whites who kill Black people in cold blood. Through the ritual torture and murder of African Americans, these white spectators reflect on themselves as white/gendered/Human. In the essay, "I'm gonna borrer me a Kodak," exploring the relationship between photography and lynching, David Marriott argues that once the crowd at a lynching had momentarily sated their grisly appetites, there is a significant and unconscious turning away from the Black body and toward the self. Here he is describing a photograph of the mob appearing in Ida B. Wells's *The Red Record*, "The assembly of (largely) white men and boys look out at the camera: judges and executioners in the lives, and deaths, of black men. Above all, they are vigilant. An image of white identity emerges from a spectacle of annihilation: the lynchers posing, grimly, alongside their black 'trophies.' A moment frozen in time, flash-lit in the heat of subsided passion."[67] According to Marriott, such portraits reveal and sustain *the violence of subjection*, to borrow from Hartman. This portraiture of the mob and their victim both captures and maintains the power of 'judges and executioners'- which is to say- the power of dominion or sovereignty. Marriott argues that lynching is inherently a process of collective self-making. The vigilante, "is fascinated by what taking the picture can do and reveal about himself: a figure in a public event, a means to fashion the self through the image of a dead Black man and the identification with fellow whites which can follow."[68] Marriott demonstrates how lynching in effect mirrors the human parasitism of slavery whereby the rendering (which can circulate long after the

[67] Marriott, *On Black Men*, 6.
[68] Ibid 9.

execution) of a Black man, woman or child into a person without power, natality, or honor imbues the white observer with a sense of racial and thus, gender identity.[69]

The demographics and intentions of Black Lives Matter Austin activists are starkly different. Consider our racial make-up: we are an intergenerational group of Asian and Arab Americans as well as Black, white and Latinx folks. We are staunch pacifists and antiracists. That is, we are in search of racial healing, not mutilation. For that reason, we strategically practice nonviolent direct action to inspire negotiation with the state and members of civil society. We gather at the site of a lynching to denounce it. Our arrival is not carnival like, but somber. It is not taken up for our entertainment, but as unpaid organizers, Unitarian ministers, ride share drivers, moms with young children, and graduate and undergraduate students-who engage in hourly and otherwise low wage work, the vigil is a sacrifice of time, energy and money that we are willing to make-- out of an antiracist duty. As Isaac and the Australian woman both told me, "I just had to do something." We insist on the humanity of Sandra Bland and that all, "Black Lives Matter." We emphasize the legality of Bland's actions before her capture. We condemn the criminality of her arresting officer and murderer(s). We band together to mourn her assassination and collectively will an end to the extrajudicial killings of African Americans in Texas and around the country. Like Isaac who invited his neighbors to a BLM-A meeting the evening before and tried to dialogue with them about their racial animus; or the slogan the 60-year-old white woman from Galveston marked on her poster

[69] For the relationship between antiblackness and gender which I will explore at length in Chapter four, see Spillers, Hortense, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Baby," *Diacritics* 17, 2(1987); and Douglass, Patrice, "Black Feminist Theory for the Dead and Dying," *Theory & Event* 21, 1 (2018).

board, "white silence = violence;" or even the impromptu prayer circle with the Waller County sheriff; we want to convince our communities to acknowledge and then abandon their antiblackness. And yet, for both the vigilante mob and the Black Lives Matter vigil, Black death provides an opportunity for nonblack spectators to reflect on themselves as nonblacks.

What do I mean by this? To answer this question, I turn back to Marriott's essay, which opens with the scene of James Cameron's would be lynching. After he witnesses the unimaginable, the mob murder of his two childhood friends, he is hunted down and sentenced to die. A noose is placed over his head. Then, an unknown white woman overturns his death sentence. Marriott quotes from Cameron's memoir, "It was a feminine voice, sweet, clear, but unlike anything I had ever heard." In Cameron's memory she says, "Take this boy back. He had nothing to do with any raping or killing."[70] And miraculously the crowd obeys and releases Cameron. Despite the relief the reader feels to know Cameron's execution was overturned (or perhaps stayed is more accurate since he is forced into hiding in a neighboring town), his rescue also disturbs. While one (the mob) takes a life and the other (the white woman) saves a life they both hold the power to determine who lives and who dies. While surely the BLM-A coalition is not the executioner of this story, I think that we do take up this position of those with the power to pardon. As nonblack allies we are told that we have the power and the duty to transform the hearts and minds of our nonblack loved ones and communities. The vigil and our photographs operate as evidence of our racial dominion as nonblack saviors. We

[70] Ibid.

may not be the officer who kills the Black woman to flex his sovereign might, but we are still engaged in racial self-making that obliterates Black self-determination. Just as the officer unconsciously disavows his rage and projects it onto Bland in order to experience himself as the victim of an assault, and authorize his lethal violence,[71] so too do we disavow our desire to hold the power of the sovereign; to experience ourselves as atoned antiracists so that we can comfortable enjoy the (strange) fruit of our organizing labor. The *I had just had to do something* becomes the defensive assertion or denial. *I did* something, or *I would never* do something like that. Sandra Bland's corpse, while not physically present, holds, "no ontological resistance in the eyes" -or minds- "of the ~~white man"~~ nonblack.[72] We conjure her body to animate an exceptional nonblack subjectivity and energize the antiracist potentiality of our nonblack loved ones and communities. We bear witness to lynchings to confirm our exceptionality as nonblack antiracists. In each case, independent of motive, Black death forges a nonblack identity.

The second possible contradiction this uncomfortable comparison presents is that, for a lynch mob, *reveling* in Black death empowers *white citizenry* to *assume the role of* the state, and for the BLM-A vigil, *mourning* Black death empowers *the multiracial coalition* to *confront* the state. Historians of lynching note the well documented presence of the state at these spectacles. Lynchings often took place outside courthouses, even on the state's own gallows, or officers opened the cell, or cleared the way through a crowd. In addition, the federal government's nonresponse to the anti-lynching crusade and

---

[71] Butler, Judith, "Endangered/Endangering," in *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising*, ed. Robert Gooding-Williams (New York: Routledge, 1993).
[72] Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1952).

refusal to pass anti-lynching legislation revealed lynching to be unofficial state policy. James Baldwin argues that the lynch mob carries out the very will of the state. In "The Price of the Ticket" he writes, "A mob is not autonomous: it executes the real will of the people who rule the State. The slaughter in Birmingham, Alabama, for example, was not, merely, the action of a mob. That blood is on the hands of the state of Alabama: which sent those mobs into the streets to execute the will of the State."[73] In other words, this violence is not an aberration. Rather, the state is antiblack; it is genocidal; and its agents are not all uniformed. They are U.S. citizens. Legal scholar, Derrick Bell, when describing the very recent past, puts the idea similarly,

> If the nation's policies towards blacks were revised to require weekly, random round-ups of several hundred blacks who were then taken to a secluded place and shot, that policy would be more dramatic, but hardly different in result, than the policies now in effect, which most of us feel powerless to change.[74]

Bell highlights how state policy subjects Black families to conditions of mass murder, but he also calls attention to our disavowal of, or indifference to, this violence since it does not always take the spectacular form of a kidnapping and staged execution.

For Black Lives Matter Austin, however, we do not revel in Black death, we mourn it. And we (mostly) do not wish to assume the role of the state, but to challenge, petition and reform it. We do not question the legitimacy of the state and its institutions. We double down on them. We accept its ways of creating social change. We are not depressed. We are energized. Although we understand police use of force and justifiable

---

[73] Baldwin, James, "The Price of the Ticket," in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: The Library of America, 1998) 840.
[74] Derrick Bell, interview by Jared Ball, July 3 2008, *I Mix What I Like*, https://imixwhatilike.org/2013/07/04/our-derrick-bell-interview/.

homicide as state violence—there is still hope. While actions of individual officers are heinous; the foundation of the institution of policing is rooted in slavery; and the criminal justice system is deeply flawed, this does not amount to a war against Black communities. Policing is a legitimate and necessary institution. It can deliver on its promise to protect and serve. Now notice how in the very same essay Baldwin similarly condemns mob violence, but simultaneously rescues the mob,

> But these ideas do not come from the mob. They come from the state, which creates and manipulates the mob. The idea of black persons as property. For example, does not come from the mob. It is not a spontaneous idea. It does not come from the people, who knew better, who thought nothing of intermarriage until they were penalized for it: this idea comes from the architects of the American State. These architects decided that the concept of property was more important – more real- than the possibilities of the human being.[75]

According to Baldwin, the mob is not inherently antiblack. Whites are not inherently antiblack. They are manipulated by the state to think of blacks as material and psychic property, flesh instead of family. He locates proof of white humanity in the desire for interracial romance. Like Baldwin we find ourselves salvageable. We can love our way out of slavery/genocide and together, we can ultimately redesign the blueprint for the American Empire-State. In each situation, whether mob or vigil, Black death empowers nonblacks and animates their loyalty to the anti-black state.

The third and perhaps the most fundamental difference that threatens my comparative work is that for the lynch mob, white spectators are motivated by a political desire for antiblack genocide and captivity, while for Black Lives Matter Austin, nonblack spectators are motivated by a political desire for integration. For Marriott,

[75] Baldwin, "Price," 841.

lynchings are compelled by ideological fantasy, what Angela Davis calls *the myth of the Black rapist*. Davis explains, "In the history of the United States, the fraudulent rape charge stands out as one of the most formidable artifices invented by racism. The myth of the Black rapist has been methodically conjured up whenever recurrent waves of violence and terror against the Black community have required convincing justifications."[76] Informed by Frantz Fanon's idea of negrophobia, the simultaneous lust for and hatred of Blackness, Marriott calls this myth a *phobic fantasy*. When this sexual and sanguinary fantasy is staged by the mob, the Black body is both literally and figuratively deformed so that whites can feel alive or free. Though, it should be noted, Marriott is mostly concerned with the psychic toll living in the wake (of lynchings) takes on surviving Black communities. He writes,

> Imagine the black man the white man wants you to be, then, and be him (or, at least, mime him). To push the point…There's no place here for what the black man wants, or for a black unconscious driven by its own desire and aggression. On the contrary. The unconscious (if that is what it is) is taken over, usurped, by identifying (with) what the white man wants.[77]

Marriot arrives at another terrifying aspect of antiblackness: the way survivors of the wake unconsciously identify with the very phobic fantasy, the very *dreamwork of racist culture* that imagines and plots their torture and demise.

Obviously, the BLM-A vigil is not compelled by the dreamwork of Black criminality and the violence it underwrites. Instead we are motivated by the antiracist fantasy of the Beloved Community. We travel to lynchings in search of antiracist

---

[76] Davis, Angela, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983) 101.
[77] Marriott, *On Black Men*, 11-12.

enlightenment that would allow us entry into the coalition space. There we connect with Blackness not as oppressors, but as imaginary kin folk. We do so by transforming Sandra Bland –not into the willful criminal- but into the *Black cyborg* (Vargas and James 2014, Vargas 2018). The cyborg, according to João Costa Vargas, is a Black political figure that, like Jesus, can angelically sacrifice Black bodily integrity as a strategy to gain nonblack recognition and thus absolve the antiblack nation of its sins. Vargas explains that in life, the Black cyborg moves through the world like his mentor Michael Zinzun, a former Black Panther and founder of The Coalition Against Police Abuse (CAPA). Vargas characterizes Zinzun as typifying the charismatic and larger than life Black male cyborg. Meaning that he represents the super human strength needed to withstand and display his suffering in hopes of garnering recognition. In death, the Black cyborg looks like Trayvon Martin, Claudia da Silva Ferreira, and Sandra Bland, those who sustained and succumbed to the unimaginable, and can thus posthumously educate, inspire and invite nonblack allies into the fold. According to Vargas, even to the extent that the average Black organizer operates under these premises or holds any of these characteristics---they too adopt a certain cyborg quality. He writes,

> We are Black cyborgs when we address Black suffering and perform a belief in societal reform (despite the ineffectiveness of institutional reform as it concerns antiblackness); we are Black cyborgs when we insist on educating Blacks and nonblacks on social injustices whose multiracial relevance originates with the recognition (and eventually erases the specificity) of Black suffering; we are Black cyborgs when we evoke love (despite the enduring and structural antiblack hatred) as that which will make full transracial recognition possible; we are Black cyborgs when, despite all evidence to the contrary, we maintain our hope that nonblacks, once they recognize the dependence of our current concept of humanity on antiblackness, will eventually divest themselves from this corrupted matrix of humanity (and the psychological, social, and material advantages that

> accrue from it), and embrace an alternative, pro-Black, even post-Black praxis of collective belonging.[78]

I quote this passage at length for it names the irrationality of the cyborg myth and demonstrates the ubiquity and power of its ideological project. Vargas argues that Black movements must be concerned with the myth of the cyborg because as a social fiction, it relies on dehumanization (either through the demand for the superhuman or at the hands of the contemporary vigilante), and disavows antiblackness and its political imperatives (despite the way it registers Black suffering).

Having sketched some of the major differences between the myth of the Black rapist and the myth of the Black cyborg, I contend that if the racist phobic fantasy of the Black rapist energized the desire to both fuck and kill the Black wo/man, the antiracist phobic fantasy of the Black cyborg simultaneously energizes feelings of love for one's Black brothers and sisters, and the desire to extinguish the Black rebel. Sandra's lynching excites our phobic fantasy. We resurrects her body as a cyborg that allows for us to holds hands and pray with the sheriff of Waller County and also condemn Micah Johnston for suggesting a radically different relationship between Blackness and the state. In the way such vigils 1) energize nonblack subjectivity; 2) empower the state; and 3) rebuke Black self-defense, antiracist allyship mutates into another form of vigilantism. Here, racial justice becomes *vigil*ante justice. What's more, if we are taking Marriott's ideas seriously about Black identification with antiblack desire, I envision the Black organizers of the vigil as akin to the grave robbers or body snatchers of the 18th and 19th century

[78] Vargas, *Denial*, Kindle Locations 4660-4667.

clandestine cadaver trade that supported the anatomical education of doctors and students of medicine to learn about, "the structure of the [human] body" through dissection (Berry 2017). These Black bodies (of the formerly enslaved, incarcerated or free) were legally obtained or more often than not stolen, by Black 'professional resurrectionists.' What can BLM-A's leadership do instead of procuring more and more bodies for nonblack (antiracist) education?

In her essay, "The Beloved Community" Joy James calls for a different conversation *about and with the dead*. She writes,

> The presence of political prisoners in the United States, such as Jalil Muntaqim, Sundiata Acoli, Mumia Abu-Jamal, and Mutulu Shakur, is rarely discussed. Political prisoners cannot be easily interwoven into our everyday history, particularly for those who trace their lineage of antiracist struggle only to King. Most political prisoners were and are not pacifists. They will not be mainstreamed and sanitized as icons for national holidays. Their belief in self-defense is more tied to chaos than organized, structured community. The question is what is our relationship to them, political violence, and their quest for freedom not just for themselves but also for the beloved community.[79]

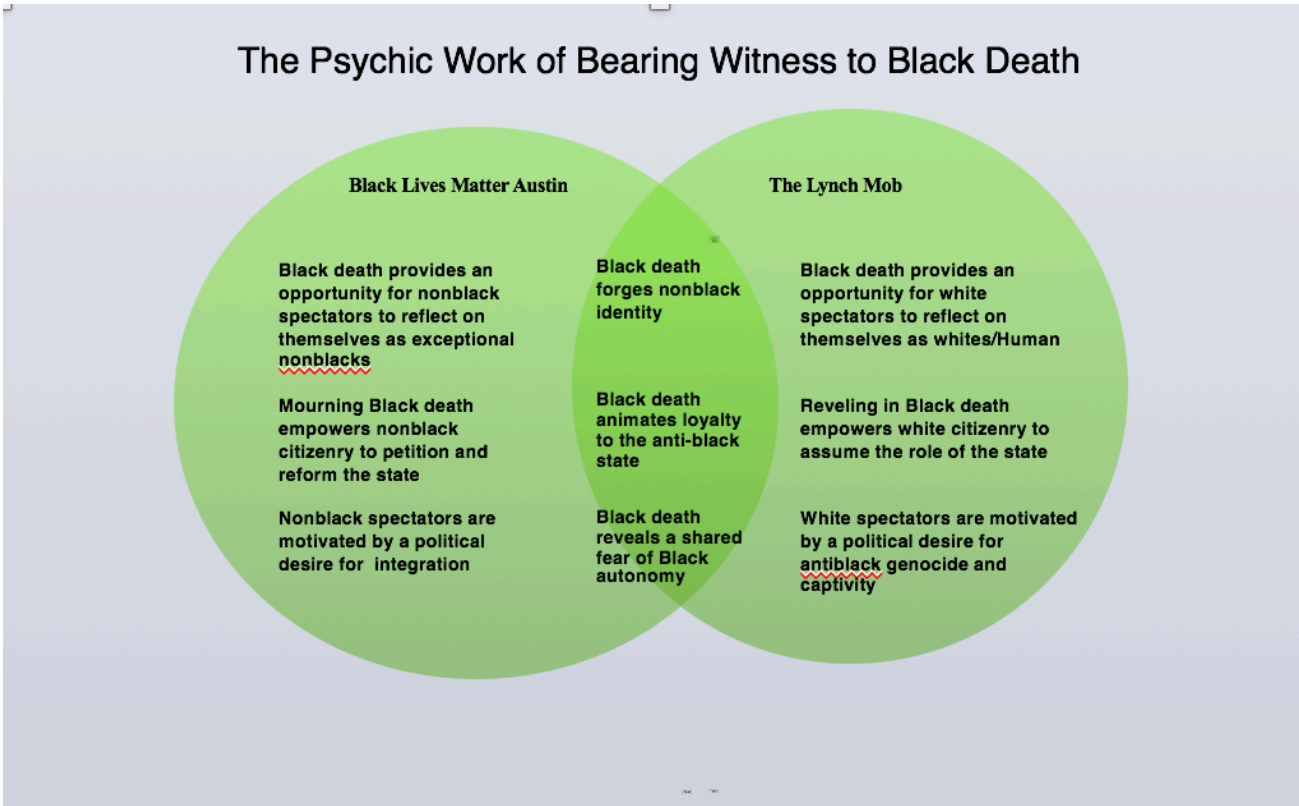
BLM-A vigil suggests that the Beloved Community is profoundly hostile, if not murderously so to the Black soldiers James names above. No doubt Micah Johnson should be killed by the state, but should it be with a bomb or with a needle? Unlike the cyborg, when James asks, "should there be a limit to suffering, even the redemptive kind? Shakur answers "Yes" and is consistent in this affirmation."[80] This refusal to suffer redemptively, the refusal of the phobic fantasy, begins with a notion of Black dreamwork, that Marriott proposes may be able to undo the material and psychological harm inflicted

---

[79] James, *Seeking*, Locations 2784-2787.
[80] Ibid. Kindle Locations 2747-2748.

on the Black diaspora, "namely, wanting, rather than hating one another…"[81] Like Sharpe's recuperation of care and empathy to be extended by and to Black folks, Marriott repurposes conventional antiracist notions of dreamwork and love as *intramural* (Wilderson 2010) projects.

Figure 2.2 Venn diagram of BLM-A and Lynch Mob



One Year Later

In July of 2017 BLM-A did not put together another trek to Waller County, but a different Black led organization (run by queer women that formed during the BLM movement moment in Austin) carried out their second annual march to the Capital for

[81] Marriott, *On Black Men*, vii.

Sandra Bland. As a surprise, Sandra Bland's mother, Geneva Reed-Veal delivered the evening's final speech. Ms. Reed-Veal tells us that she is wearing what Sandra wore the day she was pulled over: a long modestly cut sun dress, bangle bracelets, and sandals. She tells us about claiming her daughter's body. How her nails were clipped so far down to the flesh that they were still bloody. Someone had placed white gloves over Sandra's hands and the fingertips of the gloves were bloody too. She also says that her daughter's wrists were "all mangled" and suggests that there is a lot that she was advised not to speak on publicly because it would cause riots. Ms. Reed-Veal warns all of us not to be violent in her daughter's name. "If you out here burning up something. If you out hear agitating folks. If you out here snatching up stuff. Uh uh. That ain't Sandy Bland. No. stop that now." She tells us instead to vote, and to run for office. These are our mechanisms for change. She talks about being drafted into the movement and the moral of her speech is the following, "Just know that each of you have a role. If you're in the movement, move!" For Ms. Reed-Veal, the urgency of the matter demands immediate action. She repeats the refrain, "If you're in the movement you got to move!" She says, "movements move!" and "activists activate!" She is impatient with, "those of you who are confused about what your role is." She speaks to the need to do your part, "if you a letter writer do that, if you a protestor do that." Do want you can do seems to be the message, "whatever it is that you do. Do that and do it well."

At this point the reader can recognize Ms. Reed-Veal's message as firmly rooted in the paradigm of the cyborg. She anticipates the multiracial audience and their question, "what can **we** do?" She soothes them, gives them a role, and an easy one at that. They can

literally do anything, no matter how small. Her speech is seductive because it is political common sense delivered in Black vernacular. She is introduced as a holy woman by local Black organizers and she tells the crowd that her daughter did not die in vain. I find the ritual of Black fungibility to be particularly luminous (Katz 2001) in this messaging. In other words, Sandra died for our sins. It's as if her death serves to educate and awaken nonblacks. Interestingly though, there is a moment of contradiction where Ms. Reed-Veal commands those of us confused about our role in the movement to go watch *Birth of a Nation*. Her voice trails off and she doesn't finish her sentence. She stomps her feet. *Birth of a Nation* is a recent Hollywood portrayal of the Nat Turner Revolt, a slave uprising. This slippage, telling the coalition to consult the master-slave dyad to learn their role in Black organizing, presents a wholly different paradigm from one that generates and responds to white awakening. I am also reminded of that same break in 9-year-old Jeremiah Harvey's remarks to reporters where he begins by mentioning King, integration, and friendship--and then refuses to redeem his would-be lyncher ("I don't forgive that woman"), Teresa Klien a 53-year old white woman that accused him of sexual assault. This is the rupture of wake work, the return to lateral organizing around self-defense and an embrace of Assata's reminder that, "Nobody in the world, nobody in history, has ever got their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of the people who were oppressing them."[82]

I hear Sharpe's question, the compass of wake work, "What would it mean to stay safe and defend the dead," in the radically distinct way Micah Johnson related to the

[82] Shakur, Assata, *Assata* (London: Zed Books, 1988) 139.

criminal justice system in the Black Lives Matter Movement moment. I anticipate that this reading of Johnson and his revolutionary ethic may cause eyes to roll, but recall that during the Civil Rights- Black Power Movement era the legitimacy of the state's judicature was seriously up for debate. For example, Robert Williams, the NAACP president of Monroe, North Carolina was initially deeply committed to the project of integration and its strategies of nonviolence and litigation. That is until 1959 when Mrs. Mary Ruth Reed was the victim of kidnapping, physical assault and an attempted rape by a white man. Williams persuaded Mrs. Reed's brothers not to kill the attacker, but to let the court handle the matter. The courtroom was packed with Black women when the attacker was acquitted. They turned to Williams, "Now what are you going to do? You have opened the floodgates on us. Now these people know that they can do anything that they want to us and there is no prospect of punishment under law…"[83] This experience prompted Williams to accept the Black community's knowledge around the inefficiency of turning to the anti-black state for protection and the necessity of organizing along the lines of community self-defense. Realizing the court was a tool to maintain anti-blackness and not redress it, Williams adjusted his organizing strategies. In order to survive and protect their neighborhoods, Black communities had the imperative to convict their assailants in the moment. In Monroe Williams organized the Black Armed Guard which conducted night time patrols of Black neighborhoods vulnerable to white

[83] Williams, Robert, *Negroes with Guns* (Mansfield Centre, Martino Publishing, 2013) 63.

sexual violence and he urged Black folks across the country to, "meet violence with violence."[84]

The armed Black men and women of Monroe, North Carolina represent an alternative Black radical tradition that this dissertation claims has been policed out of canonical forms of Black social movements and scholarship. Limiting ourselves to the Kourt room, where the chapter begins, this tradition of Black self-defense looks like Johnathan Jackson smuggling arms into the Marin County Courthouse so that political prisoners Ruchell Cinque Magee, William Christmas, and James McClain could liberate themselves from the murderous proceedings of the judge, district attorney and so called jury of their peers. Or, when the courts failed to hold police accountable for killing Black children, self-defense resembled the Black Liberation Army's "retaliation for ongoing atrocities."[85] In other words, the justifiable homicide of law enforcement. I revisit these moments in the courtroom in an effort to explore what is seemingly no longer on the table for contemporary Black social movements. Williams along with these other Black insurgents present an alternative paradigm for how to properly defend Black communities under siege. These activist-intellectuals did not identify judges, juries, police, or even civil society as capable or worthy of redemption. Instead, they were terrorists and as Black revolutionaries, they were not interested in negotiating with terrorists. In the extremely rare circumstance that white and otherwise nonblack folks were allowed to participate in the Black radical tradition of transcendence (Vargas 2016), it involved

---

[84] Ibid.

[85] Hanley, Robert, "Witness Calls Brinks Killings Justified," *The New York Times*, September 13 1983, https://www.nytimes.com/1983/09/13/nyregion/witness-calls-brink-s-killings-justified.html.

actions such as aiding in Assata Shakur's escape from prison or assisting in bank expropriations to fund community survival programs. Their participation was limited to the role of "anti-imperialist combatants" under the leadership of BLA soldiers.[86] The limits and possibilities of such combatants will be discussed at length in chapter four.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I discussed three vignettes that appear to contest the hegemonic antiracist praxis that displays of Black suffering will register nonblack recognition. In other words, I problematized the commonsense idea that it is up to nonblack allies to solve anti-black racism. First, I argue that the Caravan to Bastrop reveals BLM-A's preference for state violence. Second, I contend that the Trek to Waller County demonstrates the fungibility of the movement's dead. Finally, I suggest that Ms. Reed-Veal's speech reveals alternative ways of orienting movement work. These ethnographic moments allow us the room to take seriously the provocative or even horrifying claim, largely informed by Hartman and Sharpe, that while the commemoration of Black death is intended to elicit empathy or care, the staged intimacy between Black corpses and nonblack allies performs a psychic labor evocative of lynching. In conclusion, this 24-month case study of BLM-A, demonstrates how antiracist allyship mutates into a form of *vigil*antism and depends upon the trafficking of Black cadavers. Our vigils and the type of recognition they provide are supposed to be liberatory. However, my findings suggest

[86] Ibid.

that such meditations on Black suffering energize nonblack subjectivity and rebuke Black self-defense.

Returning to my research question, what, if any, is the role of non-black people in Black Liberation? My ethnographic findings invite a different series of questions. What would it mean for Black social movements to acknowledge that Black suffering is inaudible and illegible to civil society/nonblacks? Or, what if Black social movements saw the non-black what can we do question as a distraction from their work and treat it accordingly? Right now we are asking, how do we make nonblack people care? What if instead we ask Sharpe's question, "What does it mean to defend the dead?" I hypothesize that this approach could re-orient Black Studies and Black movement work away from non-black potentiality and allow for an alternative place from which to defend the dead, the dying and the vulnerable. It is only by acknowledging this tension between antiracism and anti-antiblackness that we may be able to fully interrogate and challenge contemporary racial politics.[87]

The next chapter looks at another commonsense goal of the Black Lives Matter Movement moment, 'a seat at the table,' and finds it to be an equally cannibalistic undertaking. In chapter two, "A Seat at the Table" I present a case study of the largest organization to have emerged during the BLM movement moment in Austin. Like chapter 1, the ethnographic moments I explore concentrate on a canonical organizing strategy—lobbying for reform. I tell the story of our campaign against the latest police union contract, our local struggle for police accountability. Just as this chapter looked at

[87] I borrow the proposal for anti-antiblackness from João Costa Vargas.

the consequences of Black movements turning to nonblack allies for care, the following case study interrogates what happens when Black social movements turn to the state for protection and redress. I also attend more to what wake work or anti-antiblackness (i.e. alternatives to current antiracist praxis) look like and the way they are policed within/out of Black movement spaces.

Chapter 2: A Seat at the Table

PART I: PLANNING THE CAMPAIGN

It's early evening and I'm sitting in a circle around the edges of Frances and Lenny's cozy living room with activists from the Austin Accountability Alliance's police policy team. We're here for an impromptu meeting with Deray McKesson, one of the most famous BLM activists in the country. He wears his signature blue down vest, despite the warmth of a packed room on a balmy fall night in central Texas. I notice that 10 of the 14 organizers seated, including myself, are white (while the AAA is Black led, most our membership is nonblack). I expect Deray to comment on our group's racial demographics, but he doesn't. He tells us about his work with Campaign Zero to compile the first public database of police union contracts.[88] *He and his colleagues studied the contracts from 81 of the largest U.S. cities and found they presented significant barriers to police accountability (See Figure 3.1)* [89]

Deray comes across as a true policy wonk, quick with data and statistics about police contracts both nationally and in Austin specifically. He speaks on the engineered impossibility of filing a complaint against police officers and cites APD's 180-day rule, which aids officers in erasing any record of their criminal misconduct if the incident is

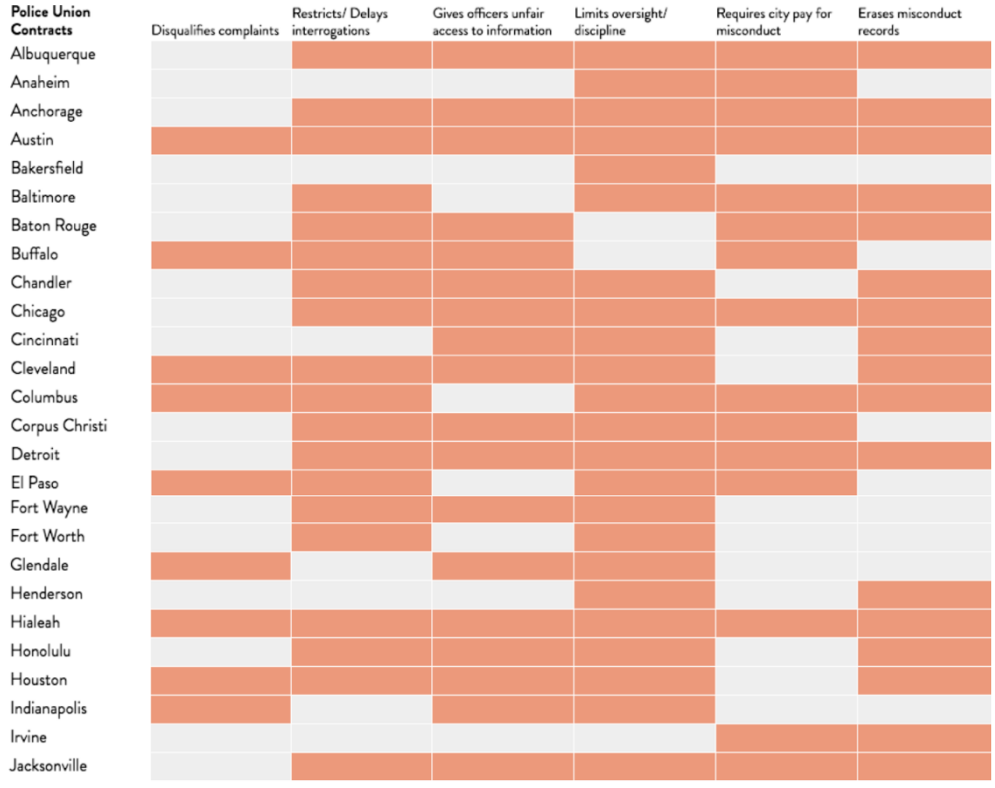
---

[88] Campaign Zero, founded by educators Deray McKesson and Brittany Packnett along with data scientist and policy analyst Samuel Sinyangwe, is a criminal justice reform think tank formed in response to the 2014 uprisings in Ferguson and Baltimore.

[89] See Deray McKesson, Samuel Sinyangwe, Johnetta Elzie and Brittany Packnet,"Police Union Contracts and Police Bill of Rights Analysis," Campaign Zero, accessed October 24, 2018, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/559fbf2be4b08ef197467542/t/5773f695f7e0abbdfe28a1f0/1467217560243/Campaign+Zero+Police+Union+Contract+Report.pdf.
For a law enforcement take on the Black Lives Matter Movement's threat to police unions see DeLord, Ron and Ron York, *Law Enforcement, Police Unions, and the Future* (Springfield, Charles C. Thomas Publisher Ltd., 2017). Notably, Ron DeLord is the current negotiator for the Austin Police Association.

not brought to the chief's attention within 180 days of the original offense.[90] *Deray and his team believe that local movements for fair police contracts could be a way to turn moral outrage against police violence into concrete policy solutions. Referring to the contracts, "People don't even know they're a place to fight!" His two main points seem to be that first, "Police shouldn't have a separate justice system" when they break the law, and second, we have a right to participate in this traditionally secretive and opaque process. In his words,* ***"We should have a say at the table."***

Figure 3.1 Portion of Campaign Zero's Contract Review. Austin's police union contract includes all 6 barriers to police accountability.



[90] Take the example of Breaion King and her 2015 assault by officer Bryan Richter. Since the dash cam video of the attack did not go public until a year later, the officers' behavior could not be investigated and penalized.

Next, Frances holds court. Now in her early 70s, Frances has been involved in criminal justice reform in Austin for decades. She is respected for her dogged lobbying and carefully delivered testimony in front of senate committees and city council meetings. She summarizes the work we've been doing around the Police Association's contract negotiations with the City of Austin. In light of the police union and the city negotiators' refusal to incorporate measures for accountability and oversight, we do not want council to approve the allotment of 80 million tax-payer dollars-worth of bonuses and benefits to police union members. France's ask of Deray and those of us in attendance is to brainstorm how we can get enough council votes. We have just five weeks to "kill the contract," she says.

Deray drives home the necessity of educating Austin residents in key districts about the contract because, "people just don't know this stuff." Clem, a queer middle aged white woman running for office, complains that residents in her district don't care about social justice issues, but are deeply angered by traffic congestion and rising property taxes. Lenny, France's partner and fellow long-suffering Texas criminal justice reformer, agrees and proposes framing our campaign around the city's budget-- something along the lines of how too much of our property taxes go to funding APD, while it could go to things like historic preservation efforts and park maintenance. Deray suggests messaging that he finds more straightforward and compelling, ***"This is not an anti-cop movement. It's pro-fair. Pro-safety. Pro-common sense."*** *In other words, what will compel residents to pressure their city council members to vote against the union contract are the simple facts and the righteous indignation that,* ***"This just isn't fair."***

INTRODUCTION: THE STRENGTH AND TERROR OF THEIR EVIDENCE

"So often in black scholarship, people consciously or unconsciously peel away from the strength and the terror of their evidence in order to propose some kind of coherent hopeful solution to things."
Saidiya Hartman, "The Position of the Unthought"

Everyone gathered in Lenny and France's home is more or less familiar with the current available statistics on lethal policing, use of force incidents, stops, (body cavity) searches, citations, seizures, deportation, rape, pretrial detention, incarceration, in custody deaths—and the list goes on.[91] We also know what happens to complaints against officers (they go ignored), indictments for 'misconduct' or convictions for criminal offenses (almost never occur), and officers who appeal their terminations (usually win). Put differently, here is a room full of data driven policy researchers and lobbyists who understand that police violence targets Black communities with an astounding precision and that this antiblack violence is state sanctioned. And yet, we interpret these numbers as presenting a fundamental contradiction with the stated purpose of policing. To do so, we must ignore not only the empirical facts at our disposal, and the anecdotal evidence that circulates daily on social/news media, but the historical record of how police and the modern punishment system originated in chattel slavery (Kelley 2000, Davis 2003).

In the ethnographic vignette above, the efforts of the Police Policy Team are not motivated by a world without or apart from police, but by a stubborn insistence, "that bourgeois civil society live up to the promises of its own rhetoric."[92] This political desire is in step with a larger trend in which grassroots level BLM activists work against police

[91] Since the numbers at our disposal are limited and current estimates are based on departments that have voluntarily reported, or the investigative efforts of activists and journalists, this preliminary data should also be understood as a gross undercount of law enforcement's violations against Black communities.
[92] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) 37.

brutality, but not against the police (Gilmore 2016, Davis 2016, Taylor 2016, Cullors 2016). Or, in Deray's words, "This is not an anti-cop movement. It's pro-fair." This political desire requires us to frame sadistic violence against Black Austinites not as *constitutive* of policing, but anathema to the, "trust between law enforcement agencies and the people they protect and serve" which is "essential in a democracy."[93] In the event that police officers fall short of their oath, it is a "fixable aberration" (Bell 2005) and we abide by policing's directives to 'comply and complain.' Meaning, when the unlawful behavior of officers occurs, Black people do not fight back in self-defense, but afterwards, earnestly seek justice through official channels. When these avenues fail Black victims, "we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt,"[94] and Black communities and their allies maintain the right to organize nonviolently, petition the state, and have their demands responded to. Significantly, this disconnect between what we understand to be the ideals of the criminal justice system and its relentless antiblack animus only seems to bolster our shared trust in the state, and its actors, institutions, and mechanisms for change. Paul Gilroy characterizes this hegemonic approach to redressing racial terror in "post slave societies" as "the politics of fulfillment" (Gilroy 1993).

In this chapter I aim to problematize Black Lives Matter activism's politics of fulfilment which depends upon tremendous faith that the Sisyphean struggle of the here and now will eventually, "realize the social and political promise that present society has

---

93 President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, "Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing," Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015, http://elearning-courses.net/iacp/html/webinarResources/170926/FinalReport21stCenturyPolicing.pdf.
94 Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream," National Archives, accessed October 25, 2015, https://www.archives.gov/files/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf.

left unaccomplished."[95] By examining this ubiquitous faith in U.S. democracy to overcome, "the unspeakable horrors of police brutality," I hope to render it strange.[96] For, as James Baldwin reminds us, quoting St. Paul, "faith is the substance of **things hoped for, the evidence of things *not seen*** [emphasis added]**.**"[97] During the Accountability Alliance's meeting with Deray our faith transmutes the overwhelming evidence that the state's institutions, agents, and processes of social change are genocidal, into evidence of the imminently more perfect union. Our faith in democratic ideals also depends upon forgetting that the entire national project was energized by the fear of, and war against, Black autonomy (Horne 2014). Our faith bears hope that the Slave State could become the Beloved Community. Faith in the democratic system depends upon what *the denial of antiblackness* (Vargas 2018). As Vargas explains elsewhere, "Collectively we seem anesthetized by, or willfully ignorant of, philosophical and empirical proof of the unique wretchedness of the Black condition."[98] This chapter draws the reader's attention to the denial of antiblackness as a central paradox of the Black Lives Matter Movement moment.

The ethnographic stories that follow map the organizing strategies made possible by a politics of fulfilment. In the previous chapter, "On Lynchings" I examined the way in which Austin Black Lives Matter activists abide by the commonsense antiracist praxis

---

[95] Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 37.
[96] King, "Dream," 3.
[97] Baldwin quotes St. Paul in an epigraph, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." James Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1985).
[98] João Costa Vargas, "Black Lives Don't Matter," Hot Spots, *Cultural Anthropology* website, June 29, 2015, https://culanth.org/fieldsights/695-black-lives-don-t-matter.

that displays of Black suffering will register nonblack recognition. As a result, we center the bulk of our movement work around nonblack witnessing. Largely informed by Saidiya Hartman and Christina Sharpe, I argued that while the commemoration of Black death is intended to elicit empathy or care, the staged intimacy between Black corpses and nonblack allies performed a psychic labor evocative of lynching. I named the banality of this move to recognize Black suffering—but only as a way to celebrate the nonblack ally- as *vigil*ante racial justice. In the pages that follow I look at three ethnographic moments from the Alliance's campaign that illustrate the ubiquity of a similar move: the recognition of state violence, but only as evidence of democracy's eminence. This chapter takes up the hegemonic antiracist notion that displays of Black suffering register *state* recognition and result in the pressuring of elected officials to negotiate with Black movement leaders or stake holders.

A Seat at the Table provides an ethnographic case study (24 months) of the largest, most active, and well-funded organization to emerge from Austin's Black Lives Matter Movement moment: the Austin Accountability Alliance. The AAA mainly lobbies for police accountability at the local, state, and (increasingly) national level. During my activist fieldwork with the AAA, I participated in many prolonged organizing efforts, but this chapter focuses exclusively on our campaign to end the "meet and confer" process that governs Austin's police union contract negotiations with the city. I organize the chapter around the predictable series of events that transpire when antiracists move against antiblack police violence. I mark these four organizing moments as follows: 1) Planning the Campaign; 2) Building the Coalition; 3) Speaking Truth to Power; and 4) A

Seat at the Table. As you recall, the chapter opens with our planning stages. I highlight the way a group of self-taught activist experts on the criminal justice system peel *away* from the strength and terror of our evidence about policing and *toward* the evidence of things not seen (i.e. democracy's ability to create transformative change). I contend that as an ethnographic scene it is emblematic of antiracism's denial of antiblackness.

The following section, "Building the Coalition" tells the story of a Travis County Democratic Party meeting as its membership vigorously debates whether to pass a resolution in favor of the Accountability Alliance's demand that city council vote the proposed police union contract down. I find that the nature of the debate hinges on whether antiblack police violence is un/warranted. While it is easy to condemn the misrecognition of Black suffering as Black criminality (police violence is warranted), it is less so to trouble the misrecognition of Black suffering as redemptive (police violence is an aberration and can be resolved to the benefit of the institution and the nation). Following Jared Sexton and Steve Martinot's discussion of police accountability, I demonstrate how despite the coalition's earnest intentions to protect Black life, our compulsion to transform Black suffering into political possibility only serves to energize the very power relations that are, perhaps, most visible in patterns of lethal policing across the Black diaspora. I argue that our racial justice lens and strategy of petitioning the state for redress denies antiblackness and dismisses a revolutionary social ethic. I challenge Black activists and their allies, in Austin and elsewhere, to take seriously a politics of abolition not as 'the' definitive approach to Black Liberation, but as a place to reorient the conversation away from accountability.

The third section, "Speaking Truth to Power" describes yet another democratic debate and vote. This scene takes place during a special City Council Meeting where members of the police union and members of our coalition debate whether or not the contract provides meaningful accountability measures. We win when the council unanimously votes to send the contract back to the negotiating table. However, the meaning of our victory is unsettled by a viral video (uploaded the same day as the vote) of a Black man brutally beaten for jaywalking and Interim police chief Brian Manley's subsequent defense of the officers involved.[99] Considering Joy James' notion that democracy, even abolition democracy-- is wedded to captivity and depends upon Black suffering, our win transforms into a win for captivity. Ultimately, I argue that "the real police contract is non-negotiable" in an anti-black world.[100] The real police contract is antiracism's inability to organize outside of democracy. The real police contract is the denial of antiblackness.

This chapter is also principally concerned with what strategies are rendered impossible by a politics of fulfilment. The fourth and final section, "A Seat at the Table" takes place during the weekly police policy meeting after said "win" at city council. Shaun, the co-founder of the Austin Accountability Alliance, and leading organizer of the

[99] For a similar incident, see the suits filed by Matthew Wallace and Jeremy King against for their arrests and beatings for jaywalking. Nolan Hicks, "Lawyers Accuse Austin police of racism in civil trial over jaywalking arrest," *Austin American Statesman,* January 9, 2018, https://www.statesman.com/NEWS/20180109/Lawyer-accuses-Austin-police-of-racism-in-civil-trial-over-jaywalking-arrest.

[100] This notion is borrowed and expanded on from a blog post written by a local Maoist organization made up largely of white youth on the margins of Austin's left. Our analysis is distinct in that they say the real police contract is non-negotiable under a capitalist society and I say the real police contract is non-negotiable under an antiblack world.

coalition against the contract, tells us about his recent lunch with Mayor Steve Adler. Adler refused our demands, and commanded Sean to put a stop to the political strategies of local Black Autonomists. I find that Sean's lunch with the mayor reveals the troubling nature of negotiation and compromise with the state. It demonstrates that a seat at the table requires intra-movement policing. Ultimately, I argue that a seat at the table does not change what communities are being devoured, it just implicates accountability activists in the cannibalism of antiblackness. This revelation, like the analogy between lynch mobs and BLM-A vigils, is not meant as a reductive self-promoting rhetorical flourish. Rather, I engage it in the belief that doing so may encourage activists and scholars to revise the canonical ways we theorize and move against antiblack racism.

In conclusion, this chapter shows how even as antiracists we do the state's work 1) by engaging in the politics of fulfilment and 2) tamping alternative political desires. I pose the question, what if the allegiance of Black movements (and Black Studies) was not to the state? What if Black movements (and Black Studies) swore an oath to something else? What would this look like? Following João Costa Vargas and Joy James, what if we were to see Black death and dispossession at the hands of police as evidence of the ever-present power relations of slavery, and as communicating the very will of the institution, and by extension, that of the democratic state and its citizenry? How would the AAA need to alter our organizing strategy?[1] I contend that we would sound more like Frank Wilderson who insists, "I'm not against police brutality. I'm against the police."[101]

[101] Derrick Bell, "Our Derrick Bell Interview," interview by Jared Ball, *I Mix What I Like*, July 3, 2008, https://imixwhatilike.org/2014/10/01/frankwildersonandantiblackness-2/.

PART II. BUILDING THE COALITION

I am with the Austin Accountability Alliance and we are standing in the dining hall of an old biergaten during the Travis County Democratic Party's monthly meeting. We are trying to build a large coalition among Austin's progressive left. Our ask for local democrats is to endorse a resolution against the police union's proposed contract. The idea being that their endorsement would legitimize our demands with the largely democratic city council. Nursing a beer, I greet friends and ask questions about the proceedings. Kevin, a 30 something-year-old entrepreneur who recently joined the Alliance is tickled by the down-home flavor of the evening's event, the eccentricity of certain characters, and the commitment to bureaucratic protocol, "This is democracy!" he coos, leaning too close. We watch resolution after resolution pass with little to no resistance--- raising the minimum wage, instating paid sick leave, endorsing candidates of color, etc. That is, until our motion is up for a vote. Several white elders take issue with the supposedly "anti-police" tone of our statement. A tall white man in his early 70s with long hair, a guayabera and horned rimmed glasses is one of the most vocal opponents. He lives on Austin's east side- a historically Black, but now rapidly gentrifying neighborhood and claims to have witnessed dozens of 'drive bys.' He says he has even seen someone murdered in front of him with a hammer in broad day light. An 80-year-old white woman, boasts that she was the foreman of the grand jury that acquitted officer Nathan Wagner- who murdered the unarmed 20-year-old Byron Carter Jr. in 2011. She insists that without being privy to the court proceedings, as she was, we are unqualified to list the killings of unarmed Black residents as evidence of police

wrongdoing. After a dozen testimonies in favor and in opposition to our item, a quorum cannot be achieved. A special meeting is convened a week later, on a private dock alongside the Colorado river. Ultimately the dissenters refrain from voting, and the resolution is passed. Everyone cheers and celebrates over drinks and a barbeque buffet. We take in the view and free drinks, but mostly people avoid coming to our table and speaking with us.

THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THE PROTESTOR AND THE POLICE

"The radical fringe of political discourse amounts to little more than a passionate dream of civic reform and social stability. The distance between the protestor and the police has narrowed considerably."
Frank Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black*

What happens when a political party is asked to recognize Black suffering? In this ethnographic vignette, we see how local Austin Democrats pass many social justice minded resolutions without controversy. However, when AAA asks the TCDP to issue a statement denouncing antiblack policing and impunity, these same Democrats are unable to reach such an easy consensus. Their ambivalence takes two sides. On the one hand, we observe those that when presented with evidence of Black suffering, see instead substantiation of Black criminality, and thus understand state violence as eminently necessary. These are the testimonies about murders committed with a hammer in broad day light, drive-bys, and attacks on police officers- be they by 'criminals' or the objectionable tone of Black activists. On the other hand, the majority of active party members roundly object to the pattern of critical incidents against Black residents and the indemnity of the officers involved. For these folks (those that drafted the resolution, brought it up for a vote, and eventually passed it unopposed), the failure of APD to hold

its officers accountable for crimes represents, "a significant miscarriage of justice."[102] This second flank of the ambivalence recognizes Black suffering as a generative opportunity to participate in, and strengthen democratic institutions (such as law enforcement or the entire criminal justice system). While it is easy to condemn the misrecognition of Black suffering as Black criminality, it is less so to trouble the misrecognition of Black suffering as redemptive. How do both these racist and antiracist logics authorize state violence? To answer this question, I begin by examining Jared Sexton and Steve Martinot's discussion of police accountability.

In "The Avant Guard of White Supremacy" Sexton and Martinot identify a pervasive contradiction among the way local movements, much like the Austin Accountability Alliance, theorize and mobilize against the killings of unarmed Black men, women, and children by police. While activists denounce police violence as a deviation from its purpose of ensuring public safety, they also acknowledge targeted gratuitous brutality as the rule of law. Despite this tension between thinking of officers as protectors or as terrorists, the authors point out that activists only ever present reformist proposals that addressed the former conceptualization of law enforcement, "None of which lived up to the collective intuition about what the police are actually doing."[103] In response to this incongruity, the authors redefine the relationship between the institution and its own criminality. They argue that (like the "cases" of Nathaniel Sanders Jr., Byron

[102] In their own words, "The TCDP expects a police department the community can trust and a police Agreement that recognizes the dignity of all people."
[103] Jared Sexton and Steve Martinot, "The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy," *Social Identities* 9, 2 (2003) 170.

Carter Jr. Ahmede Bradley, Larry Jackson Jr., David Joseph and Morgan Rankin listed in the TCDP resolution) the rape of Abner Louima, the beating of Rodney King, and the murders of 'Tayna Haggerty, Tyisha Miller, Amadou Daillo, Malcolm Ferguson, or Patrick Dorismund, are not an aberration, but the intended purpose of policing. Therefor accountability activists fail to address police brutality as structural and *not* in excess of law enforcement's social responsibilities.

The authors also reframe common understandings of who the police are. Rather than imagining law enforcement as a discrete state institution, they argue that it is more accurate and more useful to think of the police as a set of power relations. According to the authors, these power relations organize society along genocidal lines. Sexton and Martinot urge us to think of policing as a continuum of violence that extends beyond the individual actions of an officer, to the policies and institutions that created the hyper-segregated neighborhood in the first place, the collective unconscious that necessitates its policing, the symbolic violence perpetrated by the local and national news media who muse about mental illness, toxicology reports, or criminal histories, the jury that declines to indict, the department of justice that finds no wrongdoing, and the president of the united states who urges calm. They call for a paradigm shift among activists and scholars that would interpret police officers' use of lethal force against unarmed Black men, women, and children as but one articulation of society's anti-black genocidal will.

The violence and impunity the authors recount in the article suggests that APD is merely the avant-garde of antiblack terrorism, and there remain endless flanks that Austin's left has yet to acknowledge as such. They assert that such power relations

permeate even our coalition's resistance to state violence, writing, "Between the inability to see and the refusal to acknowledge, a mode of social organization is being cultivated for which the paradigm of policing is the cutting edge. We shall have to look beyond racialized police violence to see its logic."[104] For the authors, *the inability to see* is the terror of justifiable homicide. In the TCDP vote, the inability to see is represented as the move to unconditionally support officers. Sexton and Martinot write that such an example of wholesale police immunity, "serves to distinguish between the racial uniform itself and the elsewhere that mandates it."[105] The police are not just those in uniform. They are also those, like the TCDP elders, who misrecognize Black suffering as Black criminality. Such misrecognition depends upon a disavowal of antiblack animus and a projection of this violent antagonism onto Black people (Butler 1993). Their ensuing antiblack paranoia understands nonblacks as an endangered group that demands protection at all costs.

The second pillar of social organization is, *the refusal to acknowledge*, which is reflected in AAA's tireless work to condemn and repair Austinites' *inability to see*. For example, during our campaign, AAA leadership liked pointing out the hypocrisy in the way residents mobilized, won policy change, and harnessed resources in the face of animal suffering—but seemed unwilling to do so on behalf of Black suffering. They were largely referring to a 2010 "no kill" ordinance that ordered the city to keep 90% of rescue animals alive and resulted in the founding of Austin Pets Alive!, an animal shelter

[104] Ibid., 172.
[105] Ibid., 174.

designed to save stray cats and dogs that are most at risk for euthanasia. When Shaun testified against the APA contract before Austin's public safety commission, he referenced a popular "best of" poll taken by a local newspaper, "I was just nominated for best activist in the city- of course, I lost to Austin Pets Alive!, because we care more about pets in this city than we care about people that are affected by issues like [police brutality]." Kai also oft cites the hypocrisy of Austin being a 'no kill city" for animals- in fact the largest in the country- while we have no such policy mandate for human beings. Shaun and Kai's critique of *the inability to see* resonates with Comic Chris Rock's latest stand up special. He jokes, "Some say young black men are an endangered species. That's not true, because endangered species are protected by the government."[106] The aim of these jokes is to critique race hatred, or its double, apathy, and thus challenge institutions and communities to care about Black life (with the same urgency given to the protection of animal life). This hegemonic mode of addressing police violence refuses to acknowledge, in James Baldwin's words, that, "the will of the people, or the State, is revealed by the State's institutions."[107] Despite the violence of genocidal proportions wrought on Black communities by policing, we do not confront APD, city council, and their supportive constituents as conspirators in a pogrom. We refuse to acknowledge that APD is "already accountable" to *the antiblack city* (Alves 2018).

---

[106] Chris Rock, *Tambourine*, Directed by Bo Burnham, Netflix, 2018.
[107] James Baldwin, "The Price of the Ticket," in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: The Library of America, 1998), 839.

So, if Austin police are the avant-garde of antiblackness, does our protest become its last line of defense? Sexton and Martinot answer in the affirmative.[108] While law enforcement and their supporters disavow Black suffering, police accountability activism disavows the distinct relationship Black communities hold to terror. It is the very bind between state violence and organized resistance that structures antiblackness. They elaborate,

> It is a twin structure, a regime of violence that operates in two registers, terror and the seduction into the fraudulent ethics of social order; a double economy of terror, structured by a ritual of incessant performance. And into the gap between them, common sense, which cannot account for the double register or twin structure of this ritual, disappears into incomprehensibility. The language of common sense, through which we bespeak our social world in the most common way, leaves us speechless before the enormity of the usual, of the business of civil procedures.[109]

I wish to highlight the deliberate way in which the authors avoid using the language of racism when defining the power relations of policing (or antiblackness to use the framework of this dissertation). As stated earlier, this *regime* encompasses both the terror of state sanctioned violence, as well as the state sanctioned ways of appropriately resisting it. Even though members of the Austin Accountability Alliance recognize and condemn Black suffering when someone is killed or assaulted by police, we participate in the *double economy of terror* by consistently misrecognizing Black suffering as generative of political possibility.

---

[108] So does Wilderson, "Which is to say that while the men and women in blue, with guns and jailers' keys, appear to be White supremacy's front line of violence against Blacks, they are merely its reserves, called on only when needed to augment White radicalism's always already ongoing patrol of a zone more sacred than then streets: the zone of White ethical dilemmas, of civil society at every scale, from the White body, to the White household, through the public sphere on up to the nation." Frank Wilderson, *Red, White and Black* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 131.

[109] Sexton, "Avant-garde," 172.

Ultimately, Sexton and Martinot lead me to argue that "doing the work," as we call it, is part of this *twin structure* because it misrepresents the policing paradigm. Doing the work, "is a project dedicated to only looking so far at race, racism, or white supremacy so as to avoid the risk of seeing oneself there, implicated as either perpetrator or victim."[110] What do they mean by this? While we recognize Black suffering, we only do so in easy, self-affirming ways. Our reliance on a racial analysis and collective unwillingness to position ourselves along the lines of genocidal relations privileges a psychic comfort over the protection of Black lives. For example, after the inability to reach quorum was announced at the initial TCDP vote, I found myself rushing up to one seated octogenarian, tapping her on the shoulder, narrowing my eyes, and spitting, "shame!" in her face. What would it mean to look back at this moment, and see myself implicated in the power relations of genocide or the afterlife of slavery? Rather than distinguishing myself from a white racist, what would it mean for me to acknowledge my shared dependence upon social death? And what would it mean for Black leaders and members of the AAA and our larger coalition, to position themselves as subject to social death, rather than interpellation or oppression?[111]

Our *commonsense language* of police accountability and racial justice activate civic engagement, or more specifically, protest and negotiation with city officials. This is what Sexton and Martinot call, the *ritual of incessant performance,* and this is exactly

---

[110] Ibid., 179.

[111] I explore the concept of social death at length in Chapter four. Briefly, social death is Orlando Patterson's thesis, that a slave is someone without power, natality or honor. Social death, in the way I utilize it here, is an extension of Patterson's thesis into the present moment. That is, in the afterlife of slavery, the condition of the African descended is still one without power, natality or honor.

what we are gearing up for when we attend the TCDP meeting. We are there to garner the support of local Democrats so as to better negotiate with the larger democratic city council. This ritualized performance, the presentation our demands to party or city officials, seduces us into the *fraudulent ethics of social order* under which democratic institutions, such as the police, political parties, and other governing bodies have a right to exist, and become salvageable. We can show up to 'do the work' and be smitten with the process, like Kevin, or, be a bit more skeptical, like those of us on the dock—making fun of people's wealth and condescension, and moving on to the next pressing action item. Either way, our common sense becomes a trap wherein, "the solution to the problem always becomes the problem itself."[112] This commonsense is articulated in Deray's motto that opens the chapter, "we're not antipolice, we're profair" or AAA's campaign slogan, "Better before more" (i.e. better policing before more benefits, more money or more police). Despite our genuine outrage about the criminal justice system, the framework of accountability, "falls prey to a certain acceptance of criminal law; in order words, it assumes that the prison is essential to social order."[113] Responding to Black death with the politics of fulfillment only generates further policing. Under an accountability lens, Black death calls for perfecting the police--a more effective force either to protect against black criminality or to deliver a colorblind justice. The denial of antiblackness also renders recognition of policing-as-a-paradigm impossible, and those

[112] Director Setsu Shigematsu, *Visions of Abolition*, Vimeo, posted 2011, https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x4kpni4.
[113] Sexton, "Avant-garde," 177.

that do recognize and move against the paradigm are wholly illegible, and ultimately criminal.

As we see in the vignette, our current movement tools of racial justice and accountability are ill equipped to confront antiblackness because they only allow us to fight racism, without acknowledging the ways the strict boundaries of our resistance help create policing as a mode of social organization. Sexton and Martinot appeal for a new analytic that encompasses both the inability to see and the refusal to acknowledge. They hypothesize that what would follow the recognition of antiblackness would be a movement accountable to political prisoners, "Political (or politicized) prisoners demand an epistemology of a different order, one that challenges the internal limits of opposition in a radical way---the dream of prison abolition."[114] Such prisoners recognize that institutions, like the police, are intrinsically hostile to Black communities, and therefor they are concerned with the abolition of said institutions, or an autonomous existence apart from their influence.

In the next two sections, "Speaking Truth to Power" and "A Seat at the Table," I will explore how radical and revolutionary abolitionist futures are foreclosed and in fact policed by a racial justice or accountability approach. The following ethnographic vignette, marks the climax of our campaign against the new police union contract. After months of sitting in on the contract negotiations, planning protests, summoning press conferences, and holding educational neighborhood meetings in swing districts, we

[114] Ibid.

managed to mobilize hundreds of residents to testify against the APA contract at the decisive council vote.

PART III: SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

When I arrive at city hall, I pass through the sliding glass doors and place my canvas tote bag on a conveyor belt. The conveyor belt sends my pursue into an X Ray machine and then I walk through a metal detector. Once I am cleared, another security guard turns me away from chambers. Apparently, the room is at capacity. I have never seen such a turn out at a city council meeting. All seats appear taken, and people snake around the three walls facing the dais. In the lobby, I greet friends and wind up sharing an oversized chair with Cole, a biracial environmental activist and fellow police policy team member. We are seated in front of a live video feed of the meeting. The APA lawyer, city negotiator (who was the former APA negotiator) and interim police chief Brian Manley testify to the benefits of adopting the proposed contract. They weave a narrative about collective bargaining as a difficult, but mutually beneficial compromise. Cole objects, pointing out the APA's utter unwillingness to compromise and grant any of our substantial demands (aside from allowing for the submission of anonymous online complaints).

We are both anxious about public speaking so we take this time to prepare our testimony-- as do many of those around us--scribbling on pieces of paper or peering into laptops. There are other activists making signs. Frances unfurls a large scroll of butcher paper that has been transformed into a banner. It reads, "City Council must REJECT the

contract and begin to reallocate millions for root-cause solutions to social problems police can't be expected to solve!" People crouch down to sign their names until a security guard claims that they are blocking the fire exit. In addition to the city's Christmas decorations festooning the foyer, a group of white antiracists have set up a small poster board triptych memorializing some of APD's latest victims and excoriating the observer to, "end racism!" and "end police brutality!"

Figure 3.2 Left: Undoing White Supremacy Austin's memorial to victims of APD's lethal antiblack policing. Right: coalition member holds copy of Claudia Rankin's *Citizen*. Images taken with permission by author.

Finally, we get word that we can enter chambers. Inside, the audience is divided between our coalition of racial justice advocates and members of the police union. Folks from each side are called to testify in an alternating order. The activist message is

consistent. We strike a defensive posture-----"This isn't about being anti police" our testimony begins, but there's an undeniable cultural problem in law enforcement that, "impacts black, brown, poc, and women in a way that sucks for us," as Shamara testifies. The solution we propose is accountability, transparency and civilian oversight 'with teeth.' We argue that APD is, "one of the most highly compensated, yet least accountable police force in the country….it would be nice if we got some iron clad accountability in exchange for fiscal irresponsibility." There's, "minor tweaks, but not 82 million dollars-worth of change." We present the council with two options, "one, vote no. Hit reset, rebuild our systems in more accountable ways that respect our police, respect our citizens and respect our wallets. Or, two, send your team back to the table." We try to inspire council members with the chance to be a leader in the country on the issue of accountability, and we encourage them to redirect the city's public safety budget to fund, "the community services that we desperately need so we keep people out of jail and out of prison." We feel emboldened by our righteous anger. We groan and roll our eyes during APA testimony. We cheer and applaud our own speakers. The mayor regularly chides us for making the meeting longer, "I tell you that there are going to be people here between 1 and 2 in the morning because we're doing applause." Or, "We have to let everybody speak and we have to be respectful while they are speaking. That's kind of who we are in this city."

Figure 3.3 Left: Austin Police Association member. Right: Coalition Member. Their shirt reads, "Remember David Joseph." Images taken with permission by author.

APD's narrative is also quite uniform. Each APA member wears a navy-blue cotton t-shirt with white lettering that reads, "Keep Austin Safe" over their attire. Union members explain their entitlement to higher wages by emphasizing the dangerous nature of their job. "We bargained in good faith and our officers deserve this. They live in a very dangerous world. This is my badge with a mourning badge over it. I have not been able to take it off in over and month and a half because we continue to have police officers killed in a very rapid pace," testifies APA president Ken Casaday. Curiously, the police union hijacks some of our major concerns. They present the meet and confer process as one that, unlike state law, promotes accountability through the citizen review

panel (a group of appointed volunteers that has no subpoena power and can only issue secret memos to the chief of police). They also bemoan return to the written entrance exam, claiming that their current procedure allows for a more representative force. Although most APA members and supporters present are white, the union leadership self-consciously highlights the diversity of their force, making sure to frontload their testimony with Black, brown, and queer officers. One white gay officer skypes in from his wedding, "It's been said during the contract negotiations one of the things that's been brought up, our department is not diverse enough and doesn't pay attention enough to what the community expects of us. I'm here to speak about that because that's a falsehood, a myth. And certainly something I've not seen in regards with the LGBT community." A Black woman argues that reverting-back to the civil service exam will mean recruiting white men from the military. A white lesbian heralds the adoption of anonymous complaints, "this opens the door for them to hold us accountable for our actions without fear of them knowing who we are, or if there was any of that inclination."

After the final testimony, the activists are on our feet and chanting for a vote. We have been there for almost nine hours. CM Jimmy Flannigan motions to send the contract back to the negotiating table, "Before I even looked at the transparency and oversight, I realized I couldn't even afford the deal in front of me," he says. One by one CMs second his motion. It is a unanimous vote to extend the negotiations. Council members think that APD deserves the highest wages in the state. When explaining their vote, they take pains to compliment and "honor" the police. "We wouldn't have the same Austin that we all know and love without the sacrifice that you all make." "Peace officers

generally do an outstanding job." While Some council members acknowledge that the present contract does not offer enough accountability, transparency and oversight, they emphasize that the current contract is too much money and poses a risk to public safety in that it will not allow them to hire the new officers that their constituents are asking for. Nevertheless, before the meeting is even adjourned, the activists roar with approval. As I file out with others, a few minutes before midnight, I see Shaun by the door. He squeezes my forearm, and smiles, "we did it!"

MAKE AMERICA GREAT ~~AGAIN~~, OR, BLACK LIVES MATTER IS DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

Our faith in state sanctioned procedures for generating social change is reflected in AAA's willingness to participate in this highly formalized, regimented ritual; and the way we unanimously interpret the vote as a victory (however complicated, temporary or small). We show up at city hall and we follow the state's rules of engagement. We wait in line so that state agents can subject us to a search, making sure we are not armed. We wait in line to get our parking tickets validated. We wait in line to register for a brief audience with the city government, providing our real names and districts. We wait in line as security allows us into council chambers one by one, for every person that exits. We also listen to the negotiators and police union members. We speak for our allotted one to three minutes. If an activist runs out of time, we follow the protocol whereby someone who is not planning to speak 'donates' their time to extend the unfinished testimony. If we deviate from these rules or bend them in the slightest we are reprimanded by the mayor or by security guards. We earnestly deliver our carefully

crafted and rehearsed points to council members. We hold signs facing council that have messages such as, “end police brutality.” We allow council members to break for an hour-long meal and we wait for them to return. When they extend the negotiations, due to fiscal, not moral concerns, we rise to our feet, clapping and cheering. Later, we’ll organize a big party to celebrate and drink a few too many margaritas.

In other words, this ethnographic moment, the climax of a year-long campaign, represents AAA’s belief that democracy works. Many of us operate under the assumption that as long as you participate in the democratic process, your voice will be heard and redress is possible. The architects of the campaign may be a bit more weary. They acknowledge that this game is rigged, but they are willing to play. They believe that with study, strategy, grit, and the readiness to negotiate and compromise-- we can carve out small, but significant wins that will materially benefit those disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system. Our logic is that state violence necessitates the need for state action. We insist that nonviolent organizing and protest has the power to pressure the government to bring about systemic change. This line of thinking is illustrated by the Campaign Zero infographic on lethal policing. The chart compares the rate of police killings in the United State in 2014 to the rate of police killings in Germany, Australia, The United Kingdom, and Japan in 2011. Juxtaposed with these “Developed” countries, the United States’ rate of police killings is an outlier. The blurb next to the table reads in bold, “We can live in an America where the police do not kill people. Police in England, Germany, Australia, Japan, and even cities like Buffalo, NY and Richmond, CA, demonstrates that public safety can be ensured without killing civilians. By implementing

the right policy changes, we can end police killings and other forms of police violence in the United States." Like Campaign Zero, our organization trusts that lethal policing is an unwanted phenomenon, and its mutability is such that we can make significant inroads by effectively lobbying for common sense bipartisan policy change.

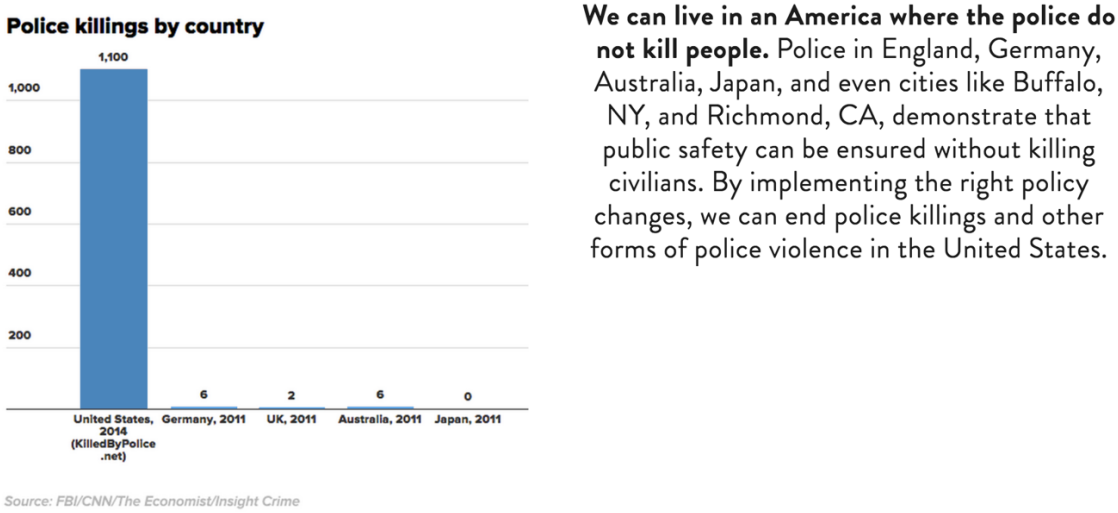


Figure 3.4 Campaign Zero Infographic

This assumption, of democracy's workableness and the power of grassroots organizing is by no means limited to Austin's local accountability movement. BLM activists across the country tuned into, and even showed up at the council vote. They shared in the construal of this organizing success as a win for democracy. Deray and his colleagues at Campaign Zero referred to it as, "an incredible display of activism and organizing;" "a real model for people across the country;" and "a big win" on their

weekly podcast.[115] Salon similarly evaluated our efforts as, "grueling work that often takes months of organizing to win even minor reforms," but nonetheless, "a demonstration of how effective local activism can be when it comes to making life better for people."[116] They quote a member of our coalition, "It was hectic. It was beautiful. It was democracy."[117] This consensus on our 'win' and its meaning echoes Barbara Ransby's sentiment that, "Black Lives Matter is democracy in action."[118] It is not hard to imagine that Eddie Glaude, another admirer of the Black Lives Matter Movement, would interpret AAA's struggle against the dehumanization of African Americans (through grassroots organizing, direct action, and electoral politics) as an exemplar of what he calls, *Democracy in Black* (Glaude 2016).

However, there is also a respected line of Black political thought that is more cautious about the meaning of campaigns like our own. These activist scholars argue that to effectively defend against state violence, grassroots Black Lives Matter organizing will have to *abolish*, not reform, the criminal justice system. They take issue with our goal of implementing policy change that allows for the investigation and punishment of officers involved in criminal activity. This, "focus on legalistic approaches to resolve police brutality" is misguided, they argue, for the aim of prosecuting individual perpetrators

---

[115] Deray McKesson, "Courage," *Pod Save the People*, Podcast audio, December 19, 2017, https://crooked.com/podcast/courage/
[116] Amanda Marcotte, "Austin Activists Win Important Victory on Abusive policing," *Salon*, December 22, 2017, https://www.salon.com/2017/12/22/austin-activists-win-important-victory-on-abusive-policing/.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Barbra Ransby, "Black Lives Matter is Democracy in Action," *The New York Times*, October 21, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/21/opinion/sunday/black-lives-matter-leadership.html.

tends to individualize the structural nature of antiblack racism.[119] Unlike Campaign Zero's interpretative framework, for these activist intellectuals, our campaign misses the point made earlier by Sexton and Martinot, that violence is inherent to policing. They warn against the impulse to perfect institutions that are rooted in the destruction of Black communities. While they understand the need for harm reduction, "minor tweaks" such as the ability to anonymously file an online complaint, "focus energy and resources, ultimately changing little."[120]

For abolitionists, attempts to perfect an institution that is antithetical to Black life, only results in the fortification of its power. Like Ruth Gilmore's historical account of California's punishment system that demonstrates how prisoners' legal activism against indeterminate sentencing and overcrowding led to harsh mandatory sentencing and the largest prison boom in the history of the world—our campaign, and our calls for police reform, similarly result in the co-optation of our demands by the APA and plans for the expansion of the city's police force. Furthermore, our time spent negotiating with APD allows them to claim, "a pretty strong reputation around the country for being a rather progressive police department."[121] Since the emergence of the AAA from Austin's Movement for Black Lives, it has become standard operating procedure for the police chief to name drop the Austin Alliance for Accountability (and other Black led criminal justice reformers like Measure Austin) during press conferences and community forums

---

[119] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), Kindle Location 3449.
[120] Ruth Gilmore, "Beyond Bratton," in *Policing the Planet*, ed. Camp, Jordan T. and Christina Heatherton (London: Verso Books, 2016), 176.
[121] Remarks made by Police Chief Brian Manley during the city council meeting in question

on policing. Our negotiations with APD also give interim police chief Brain Manley social capital that he mobilized for his successful bid at being appointed permanent chief. The following quote is from a flyer Manley circulated during a local press tour as lone finalist for chief. The flyer reads in part,

> Chief Manley has realigned APD operations to strengthen his commitment to community policing and improving the quality of life for all in Austin. He is credited with implementing APD's first de-escalation policy in collaborations with a local activist group and mandating all APD staff attend Fair and Impartial Policing training. Chief Manley voluntarily submitted to go through an equity assessment by the City's Equity Office later this year. He also attended the Undoing Racism training in advance of implementing a department wide program.[122]

Abolitionists argue that accountability work, like AAA's campaign against the contract, vampirically sucks us of our time and energy, and, returning to Gilmore's words, it changes little. Instead, it serves to misrepresent and legitimize APD as one of the most progressive departments in the country. Our activism for *better* policing practices only manages to enable a conversation about how to fund *more*, "peace officers." For abolitionists, our campaign is not a successful model of organizing. Instead, a win for such thinkers, would look more like holistic resistance to police violence that reduces –not improves- the role of police in our lives. For abolitionists, this work begins by asking a more provocative series of questions (Ritchie 2017) about the criminal justice system, perhaps most fundamentally, interrogating the entrenched idea that prison is for bad people. For example, Angela Davis writes, "If we're thinking about someone who has committed acts of violence why is that kind of violence possible? Why do men

[122] It is worth mentioning that this stop on his tour was at the Turner-Roberts Recreation Center, a gymnasium named after Velma Roberts and Dorothy Turner, leaders of The Black Citizens Task Force, a grassroots police accountability organization most active in the 1970s. Their reform efforts resulted in the very meet and confer negotiation process AAA is working to end. The complex is located in Colony Park. While Colony Park is fifty percent Black and 50% Latinx, almost no residents of color were in attendance.

engage in such violent behavior against women? The very existence of the prison forecloses the kinds of discussions that we need in order to imagine the possibility of eradicating these behaviors."[123] Davis' line of questioning reveals how the scale of Abolition is different from AAA's political project. Not only does she call for the eradication of the institution of policing, but her elementary commitment is to dismantle the very modes of violence that generate its construction. Although abolitionists recognize the real essential nature of the state (Abu-Jamal 2015) as antagonistic to this struggle, like AAA, they too find hope in multiracial collectivities and the nonviolent struggle for democracy (Davis 2016). Abolitionists agree that grassroots resistance matters (Kelley 2014), and that ultimately, we will win (Cullors 2018).

Joy James argues that Abolitionism dangerously distorts the nature of democracy. For James, even an abolitionist critique of AAA's campaign against the contract would fall short of really naming and moving against the problem at hand. In the introduction to an edited volume of writings by imprisoned intellectuals, James insists, like many of the book's contributors, that we are still living in times of slavery. Thinking about the prison as <u>just one</u> site of *penal or slave space*, she argues that the contemporary Abolitionist movement functions as a *(neo)slave narrative*. Elsewhere James describes this narrative as follows,

> Traceable to the 19th-century works that garnered considerable attention, this narrative is characterized by political traits that contextualize antiracist resistance in ways that at times mitigate black radicalism. First, it is marketed through literature (or cinema) accessible to liberal or moral (white) Americans, and so like its precursor, the slave narrative, it makes its appeal to the 'moral conscience' of the dominant culture. Second, the neoslave narrative identifies fixed and therefore containable sites of freedom and enslavement. It juxtaposes the southern plantation

[123]Angela Davis, *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 22.

> against the northern city in the 'free' or nonslave state. The former represents the site for the denial of freedom and democracy, the latter the site for the acquisition of same. In such narratives, the victorious 'slave' must engage in flight—from the plantation, the South, the zones of black immiseration—in order to triumph.[124]

First, the passage notes that the moral appeal of the Abolitionist, whether old or new, assumes the conscience of both nonblacks and the empire state. For James, slave narratives were an account of the terror of objecthood, but they also functioned to reassure a white readership that the country could eventually assimilate the enslaved and respond to Black political demands. Along the same lines, the Abolitionist interpretations of the BLM movement (explored above) acknowledge the horrors of state violence, but simultaneously depict the (slave) state as, "reformable, and so inherently democratic." [125] In as much as they believe nonviolent direct action and other ethical appeals to the country's 'founding principles' can be heard, like slave narratives, Abolitionist literature has confidence that, "America works to fulfill on some level its democratic promise."[126]

Secondly, the passage demonstrates how old and new abolitionist scholarship operates to de-radicalize Black movements by misrepresenting the nature of freedom. For the Abolitionist, James writes, "the state, despite its abusive excesses, provides the possibility of emancipation and redemption. According to such narratives, the state cannot therefore be considered or constructed as inherently and completely corrupt; for the state enables and maintains the sites of freedom (open society), as well as those of

---

[124] Joy James, *Shadowboxing* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 94.
[125] Ibid., 95.
[126] Ibid.

enslavement (prison)."[127] Returning to Hartman's discussion of the popular abolitionist medallion explored in chapter 1, the new abolitionists likewise misrepresent *un*freedom as fixed to the confines of the plantation or the prison; and freedom as the state's legal termination of the institution and succeeding bestowal of rights upon former captives. James counters that since slavery is an ontology and not merely a metaphor for incarceration, its grasp extends far beyond the punishment system, and demands much more than rehabilitation. In her own words, "There is no free space, as we know it, without penal or slave space, as we fear it,"[128] and by extension, "Freedom is *taken* and created."[129] To put it another way, James is arguing that Democracy and its promised freedom is parasitic and necessarily depends upon the existence of unfree bodies. Slavery is not anathema to democracy, and its appetites, but is revealed as its very life force.[130] Thus, freedom requires democracy's destruction.

Like the 13th amendment that ends slavery only to reconstitute it, James encourages a healthy suspicion towards contemporary, *enslaving anti-enslavement narratives* proffered by the state and abolitionists alike. Returning to the campaign's convening at city hall and the council's vote 'in our favor,' I ask, how does this state gesture *ensnare as it emancipates*? [131] Despite the coalition's steadfast determination to

---

[127] Joy James, "Democracy and Captivity," *The New Abolitionists*, ed. Joy James (Albany: SUNY, 2005), xxxi. For another critique of the limits of abolitionist praxis see Frank Wilderson, "The Prison Slave as Hegemony's (Silent) Scandal," *Social Justice* 30, 2 (2003).
[128] Ibid., xxxv.
[129] Ibid., xxii.
[130] "Democracy rooted in captivity and social parasitism mean that the civic body fed itself through the state's legal (criminal) apparatus and procurement and containment of racially fashioned bodies." Ibid., xxiv.
[131] I borrow the italicized language from James's discussion of the Thirteenth Amendment see: Ibid., xxii.

celebrate out "win," consider what occurs after the city council vote. First, while a few council members cite concerns about accountability, the majority of votes to extend the negotiations are cast out of a fiscal anxiety: the gargantuan increase to APA bonuses and benefits will prevent the council from being able to hire more police. Second, after the serial bombings in March of 2018, council members praise APD and begin calling for a new vote, so that 1) the contract can be approved; and 2) Brian Manley can be instated as permanent (rather than interim) chief. Keep in mind, this boostering of APD is taking place after detectives fail to investigate the first bombing since the victim, 35-year-old Anthony Stephan House, was Black. Instead, they suspect he is the culprit. The actual bomber, Mark Anthony Conditt, a young white man living just north of Austin in Round Rock goes on to deliver four more explosive devices that kill 17-year-old Draylen Mason (also Black), and injure three other people, one of them critically. Also remember that when APD posthumously captures Conditt (almost three weeks after House's death), Chief Manley refuses to call him a terrorist and sympathetically describes him as, "a very challenged young man." When the coalition organizes yet another turn out to council as we try to fight their attempts at reinstating specialty pay and thus giving away the rest of our bargaining power, we are met with tearful testimonies from the some of the highest paid officers in the country about how their families are suffering gravely from the temporary loss of their supplemental income. Councilwoman Delia Garza, moved by this testimony scolds community activists for our supposed divisive and punitive stance towards APD.

Figure 4.5 Local chain restaurant and bar thanks Chief Manley, APD, and other law enforcement agencies after Mark Conditt was found dead in his car. Image taken by author on March 27, 2018

Lastly, the exact same day the council issues their vote to extend the negotiations, a video captioned, “Dey fina kill em,” is posted to YouTube and shows APD officers beating and tazing a Black man in handcuffs. It receives over a million views. Jason Donald, the victim in the video, was followed by four officers into the Signature gas station convenience store along I-35 and arrested for ‘jaywalking.’ The video of his subsequent assault and the ensuing public outrage prompts an ‘investigation’ by APD. To hear Chief Manley tell it, as reported by a local news channel, “the officers ended up on the ground when Donald pushed the officers and they lost balance, falling on top of him on the ground. The chief said surveillance video from the gas station, which has not been released, showed Donald get out of one of his handcuffs and try to get away.”[132] The story continues to explain that according to APD’s use of force policy striking a suspect is not prohibited. In Manley’s own words, "It just has to be objectively reasonable to be within policy at that point."[133] What Manley *does*

[132] Andy Jechow, “Community activists rally around man punched by Austin police officers,” *KXAN*, January 12, 2018, https://www.kxan.com/news/local/austin/community-activists-rally-around-man-punched-by-austin-police-officers_20180312080126 33/1031522224.
[133] Ibid.

find unreasonable, is the sartorial choices of the officers involved--two of whom are disciplined for wearing balaclava masks and one for sporting a blue Santa hat that reads, "Naughty."[134]

In other words, the council's willingness to listen to hours of our testimony, consider our demands, and extend (rather than approve) the negotiations functions as an emancipatory gesture that we celebrate as potentially liberatory. While not proposing outright abolition, it seems as if this extension could be an opportunity to reimagine public safety, in part, by funneling money to alternative public services. But what actually happens during and after this vote? Council promises to fund the expansion of the police force; they reinstate specialty pay; law enforcement resumes its participation in and further sanctioning of the stalking, brutalization, and murder of Black residents unabated; and Manley is promoted to permanent chief. Considering Joy James' notion that democracy, even abolition democracy-- is wedded to captivity and depends upon Black suffering, our win transforms into a win for captivity. Ultimately, I argue that the real police contract is non-negotiable in an anti-black world. The real police contract is antiracism's inability to organize outside of democracy. The real police contract is the denial of antiblackness.

James invites us to ask, if *this* is what emancipation looks like, then what could gestures towards freedom look like? Although the campaign operates as if there is no alternative to petitioning the state and otherwise participating in the democratic process,

---

[134] Anecdotally, I met officer Keston Campbell, who wore the Santa hat, on 6th street during a cop-watch. We filmed him flirting with two young intoxicated light-skinned Asian American women. When we told the young women about his involvement in Donald's assault, they joke that he can 'beat' them anytime he wants.

James reminds us of *slave-insurrectionists* that, "question the very right of the state (as master) to exist," and seek, "not the mere abolition of penal captivity or slavery, but the abolition of all masters, including the state-as-master or master-state."[135] The next section considers how local Black autonomists that participated in the campaign present their desire for freedom (as opposed to emancipation). We will think carefully about their stance toward council and the coalition, and how *democracy in black* (Glaude 2016) requires the policing of their freedom dreams--not only by law enforcement, but also by fellow activists.

PART IV: A SEAT AT THE TABLE

After formally celebrating our win, the policy team takes a few weeks off from organizing. We reconvene in January for our weekly Sunday meeting at the downtown German beer garden popular among progressive organizers. As we wrap up our check-in over the state of contract negotiations, Sasha, a leading organizer of the coalition, turns to Shaun, who is just now arriving, and asks, "How was your lunch with the mayor?" Our team's membership, previously unaware of this meeting is also eager to hear about it. First, Shaun breaks the news that the Mayor refused our demand to invest in alternative ways of ensuring public safety (such as rehabilitation). The surplus in the city's budget will only be spent on policing. Second, Shaun relays that the mayor is dismissive of the 200 people we brought to council chambers a month prior. He believes that there is a silent majority of Austin residents who support the police contract. His

[135] James, "Democracy and Captivity," xxii.

constituents inform him that they were too scared of BLM activists to testify. In fact, the Mayor went so far as to admonish Shaun and request that he put an end to certain protest styles deemed too confrontational. Shaun laughs at this, but he relents that there were aspects of our action he did not agree with. In particular, he references the tactics of Keep Austin ~~Weird~~ Black.

In their own words, Keep Austin Black (hereafter KAB) is an anticapitalist collective that focuses on developing autonomy in Black communities. I think back to the council meeting in question and remember how the founder of KAB refused to abide by the strict protocol that limits public testimony to 3 minutes. Rather than making the apologetic move that APD was a fine department before introducing her concerns, she characterized the coalition's presence there as, "begging for their lives." Instead of performing a calm or deferential demeanor, her affect was distinctly angry and irreverent. Her comrades also posted handmade signs reading, "fuck the police!" that were removed by security guards. And during the dinner break another KAB member led us in shouting Assata's letter "To My People" in a call and response. "We have a duty to fight for our freedom! We have a duty to win! We must love and support each other! We have nothing to lose but our chains!" Frances echoes Shaun and recalls the "lies" signs that some activists held up during police testimony. Shaun hammers home the point that this kind of approach is inefficient because it alienates the very people we are trying to negotiate with.

THE USES OF ANGER

"But anger expressed and translated into action in the service our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification, for it is in the painful process of this translation that we identify who are our allies with whom we have grave differences, and who are our genuine enemies."

Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger"

Over the course of KAB's outspoken criticism of the police labor contract, the group's founder and most vocal leader is subjected to police surveillance, harassment, tickets and arrest. At a flyering event KAB organizes to create awareness about Donald's assault, I witness an officer call this community leader by her first name, an obvious intimidation tactic. In recounting APD's attempts to repress her leadership and the work of KAB, I am reminded of our conversation about the film Birth of a Nation, by Nate Parker. She saw it as an attempt to instill fear in Black audiences and dissuade revolutionary Black political desire. I see the vignette above similarly. There, activists of the BLM movement moment perform their own kind of policing of revolutionary and even radical political desire. Far from an outlier, Shaun's lunch with the mayor represents a much wider trend of intra-movement policing. Without equating actual police violence and this movement level censorship, I do want to mark the similarities. Both kinds of actions have the effect of marginalizing certain forms of Black political longing--especially any intent to antagonize the state. It also isolates radical community organizers and shrinks their base of support rendering them more vulnerable to state violence. Borrowing a rhetorical strategy from Audre Lorde, I will give a few examples of such interchanges between grassroots organizers that illustrate this point. For example:

-At a forum on policing hosted by the Travis County Democratic Party, Shaun squelches a rare moment of audience anger. Unprompted, he interjects into the Q+A and 'reminds' the audience, which includes relatives of people recently murdered by APD, that the police and district attorney, "are people too."

- An organization that uses the Black Panther Party language of 'pigs' to refer to police is deemed distasteful and completely alienated from Austin's left.

-During a vigil for Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, a Black woman in the crowd keeps interrupting the Black middle class poets on stage with humorous critiques and commentary implying that they, and the largely white audience, are full of shit. When some of the emcees call her out and shame her for 'breaking unity' and cussing, the largely white/non-black audience cheers loudly.

-An activist's mic is cut during a speak out against the murder of unarmed 17-year-old David Joseph when they warn that BLM organizers are meeting with APD brass and are at risk of being co-opted.

-At an antiracist banner making event I am told that I cannot make a sign that reads, "Austin is Ferguson," because, "people won't like that." Neither can I make the sign, "fire killer cops," because, "this is not a fuck the police action." Nor can I make the sign, "End genocidal policing," because, "it's not like *all* black folks are getting killed."

-Militant activists disrupt a forum on gentrification, challenging its progressive organizers' entanglements with corporate and city interests. A white antiracist group shuts down their action and circulates a manifesto against the militant left entitled, "Hatred and bullying have no place in our movements!"

-On Facebook, a BLM-A leader lambasts a t-shirt that critiques pacifism and promotes Black self-defense, it reads "Dear racism, I am not my grandparents. Sincerely, these hands." She directs Black activists not to wear the shirt and to, "stop dismissing our grandparents' struggles."

-Gavin Eugene Long shoots six law enforcement officers, killing three of them in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Micah Xavier Johnson shoots 14 officers in Dallas, Texas, killing five. A BLM-A leader responds to these events by attending a Blue Lives Matter vigil. Her photograph, embracing the chief of police appears in the local paper.

To the readers who recognize these moments and attitudes as familiar, I want to speak about anger, Black anger, and what I have learned from my travels through police accountability activism. Certainly, Black led movements in Austin are working in a

context of opposition and threat, the cause of which is not the angers which lie between Black activists, but rather the virulent hatred leveled against the diaspora. That being said, why do these moments evoke a sense of coercion? A foreclosure of possibilities? What is the cost of the respectability politics the mayor and Shaun demand? What do you (always already) have to sacrifice in order to negotiate? Are we offering each other up to the state for a seat at the table? Could it be that our vying for a limited number of seats available at the negotiating table itself becomes a seductive diversion from revolutionary work?[136] Could Black movements be spending time elsewhere? What is the relationship between a seat at the table and intra-movement policing?

To answer these questions, I turn to Lorde's 1981 essay, "The Uses of Anger."[137] In her speech delivered at a women's studies conference, ostensibly to an audience of largely white women, she stakes a claim in the legitimacy of Black anger (or, to use Lorde schema, 'women of color'). While I do not wish to subsume the Black diaspora and nonblack people of color, nor do have any interest in parsing out the difference between hatred, anger, and destruction, or offering Black anger as a redemptive tonic for the implicit bias of nonblack organizers,[138] I do wish to think carefully about Lorde's response to her *lack of humanness* and survival in spite of a world which hates Black *existence outside of its service*. Lorde's response to the condition of antiblackness is anger. In her speech, she insists that this is not only a legitimate and appropriate

---

[136] Sara Saylor helped me develop this question.

[137] For another reading of this essay see Jared Sexton, "Afro-Pessimism: The Unclear Word," Rhizomes 2, 29 (2016), https://doi.org/10.20415/rhiz/029.e02.

[138] For a reading of Black anger as redemptive in the BLM movement moment, see: Juliet Hooker, "Black Lives Matter and the Paradoxes of U.S. Black Politics," *Political Theory* 44, 4 (2016).

emotional response, but that it is profoundly instructive to movement work. "Anger is loaded with information and energy," she writes.[139] If we extend her essay to its limits, it encourages Black communities to confront their anger, despite any initial discomfort in doing so. She coaxes the listen/reader, "My fear of anger taught me nothing. Your fear of that anger will teach you nothing, also."[140] Can Black movements and Black Studies engage in a similar exercise? Can these formations really grapple with the anger displayed by KAB toward both canonical forms of organizing and the state? What would the information and energy of Black anger tell us if activists and scholars were not so quick to apprehend, dismiss, ridicule, demonize, and otherwise distort it? Just as Lorde calls on white feminists to stop policing the anger of women of color, I propose that Black movement spaces stop policing Black anger in order to fully grasp its utility. In Lorde's words,

> Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change. And when I speak of change, I do not mean a simple switch of positions or a temporary lessening of tensions, nor the ability to smile or feel good. I am speaking of a basic and radical alteration to those assumptions underlining our lives.[141]

Tending to Black anger then fuels *revolutionary* change, not the kind of change that results from a chief of police attending an Undoing Racism Training, but one that radically alters our most fundamental assumptions about the world, and thus results in the total restructuring of the world, to borrow from Fanon. Tapping into this arsenal of anger

---

[139] Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger," in *Zami Sister Outsider Undersong* (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1993), 127.
[140] Ibid., 124.
[141] Ibid., 127.

is essential if the hegemonic politics of Black love (for nonblacks as I explored in chapter one, and for the state as I've done here in chapter two) that restricts Black political desire to redemption and integration is to give way to a desire for Black autonomous lifeworlds (Vargas 2018).

When Black movements turn away from the evidence that the state and its institutions are genocidal, and away from collective rage, there is a turn toward formal politics. The AAA takes the spirit of Shirley Chisholm's quote to heart, "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair." And so, we tirelessly **sit in** on the negotiations, and **sit down** with the mayor for lunch. But, what happens when we finally get a seat at the table? We win only a temporary stall to the negotiations; APD continues to terrorize black residents with impunity; the mayor refuses to use the city's money creatively; and he deploys us to police the political desires and strategies of fellow activists. The reader may be thinking, "If you're not at the table you're on the menu." And I would agree with you. But the coalition's seat at the table does not change what communities are being devoured, it just implicates accountability activists in the cannibalism of antiblackness. What is the price of admission for a seat at the table? I argue that it is the disavowal of antiblackness and the foreclosure a wholly different approach to social change, one evoked by KAB: an embrace of Black anger, an abolitionist stance against police, a critique of the hegemonic method of engaging the state, and an invocation of the Black Radical Tradition

As I reflect on the image of a seat at the table, I am reminded of Stevante Clark (the brother of Stephon Clark, murdered by police in March 2018) storming the

Sacramento city council meeting and sitting on top of the mayor's dais. Sitting *on* the table, not at the table, he declared the criminality of the local government and police department and appointed his friend as acting mayor. I also think of Sheila Hines-Brim who threw the ashes of her niece, Wakiesha Wilson at LAPD chief Charlie Beck during a Los Angeles police commission meeting. Wilson died in police custody in 2016. Hines-Brim's gesture similarly convicts the organized crime of the LAPD and city government, and reveals "the table" as nothing more than a Black flesh-eating feast. How can we listen to Mr. Clark and Ms. Hines-Brim's refusal of compromise and negotiation not as a kind of unattainable political purity or idealism, but one deeply concerned with the practical urgency of now? Given the genocidal proportions of antiblack violence, the conciliatory approaches taken by the campaign against the contract, while certainly well meant, just do not work to the degree we need them to. I argue that it is important to recognize this because if protecting Black communities is the goal of Black movements, police accountability is not the answer. Accountability activism winds up empowering institutions that are rooted in the destruction of Black life. In order to, at best, prevent movement stasis and at worst, prevent complicity with genocide, Black movements must consider Ms. Hines-Brim's and Mr. Clark's critique; and the way in which the negotiating table renders activists increasingly compromised.

CONCLUSION

This chapter argues that contemporary Black movements (and by extension, Black Studies) share a certain political praxis with law enforcement. To do so, I present a

case study of a Black led grassroots effort to reform Austin's police union contract. I examine four representative scenes from the campaign: 1) Planning the Campaign; 2) Building the Coalition; 3) Speaking Truth to Power; and 4) A Seat at the Table. Each ethnographic moment highlights a paradox. That is, despite repeatedly facing evidence of the moral bankruptcy of the democratic process –we insist on transforming Black suffering into political possibility. The ethnographic vignettes also speak to another pattern: the intra-movement policing of those who question the right of the democratic state to exist (no matter how incipient their political desire is). Ultimately, I argue that the real police contract is antiracism's refusal to organize outside of democracy and that as a result, the goal of a "seat at the table" cannibalizes Black suffering.

The next chapter introduces the third and final case study of a grassroots activist group that I organized with during the BLM movement moment in Austin Texas (2016-2018). In chapter one- I explored BLM-A's strategic use of vigils to memorialize the dead; in Chapter two I examined the work of volunteer-antiracist lobbyists working for policy change, and in this coming chapter I present yet another approach to the policing crisis, that of cop-watching. As I attend to how cop-watchers understand and organize against antiblack policing, I will return to a number of the themes discussed here such as the promise and limits of abolition, as well as the relationship between accountability and abolition. I will also continue our earlier interrogation of witnessing as explored in Chapter 1. It bears mentioning that Chapter three, "Policing the Police: The Black Radical Tradition in the Era of Black Lives Matter," is organized around another critical engagement with Audre Lorde. This time I consider her essay and the adopted adage of

canonical antiracism, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." Chapter three thinks carefully about Lorde's question, "What does is mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy?" I tweak her question and ask, what does it mean when the tools of antiblackness are used to examine the fruits of antiblackness? Lorde answers that it means only the narrowest parameters of change are possible. While Lorde's argument about the master's tools is typically wielded to denounce Black self-defense, I take up the tool of historical materialism and subject it to her course of reasoning. I find that whether deployed by scholars of the Black Radical Tradition or movements taking up Black radical forms, it allows a revolutionary ethic to be articulated, but only if such an ethic is *not* in the service of Black autonomy.

Chapter 3: Policing the Police

INTRODUCTION: POST-FERGUSON ANXIETY

This dissertation explores the relationship between the contemporary policing crisis and the Civil Rights-Black Power movement. How were Black activists almost seven decades ago envisioning a world that was safe for Black communities? What alternative institutions, relationships, and ontologies did they foresee? And why does our present moment seem so devoid of their proposals? As I submit these questions, it should be noted that there is intense debate over how to understand the Black Power movement and what lessons are to be learned by current organizers. Does Black Power look like the election of president Obama and the transformation of U.S. democracy (Joseph 2010) or the destruction of said democracy and instead, the establishment of global Black sovereignty (Swan 2013)? Is the dream-work of revolution or marronage taken up by some Black Power organizers largely "unrealistic" with, "little to offer in terms of practical benefits to the black masses,"[142] as historian Leonard Moore contends, or do its insurgents hold concrete and urgently needed insights into the struggle for Black survival (Vargas 2018)?

In particular, this chapter's interests lie in the renewed debate over the legacy of Black Panther Party as 2016 marked the 50th anniversary of its founding. Are we to understand the Panthers as engaged the largest armed revolutionary struggle since the civil war (Bloom and Martin 2013), or were they simply 'middle of the road,'

[142] Leonard Moore, *The Defeat of Black Power* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018), 151

'mainstream,' and, more like, "the extreme wing of the Civil Rights movement?"[143] Were the Panthers heteropatriarchal nationalists perpetuating state violence, or, did they represent a chance for young a Black woman, in the words of Kathleen Cleaver, "to take collective action against the repressive social conditions she faced, and bring about revolutionary change"[144]? Again, what exactly is the relationship between the Black Power-Civil Rights struggle and the movement for Black Lives and why does this matter?

In a recent interview published in 2017 scholars Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin ask Angela Davis to evaluate the Black Lives Matter Movement and compare its political praxis with that of the Black Panther Party for self-defense, "What is your assessment of the Black Lives Matter movement, particularly in light of your participation in the Black Panther Party during the 1970s? Does Black Lives Matter in your view, have a sufficient analysis and theory of freedom? Do you see any similarities between the BPP and BLM movement?"[145] Davis responds by saying that she finds the, "radical differences," between these movements to be a more generative locus of conversation. In her words,

> The BPP emerged as a response to the police occupation of Oakland, California, and Black urban communities across the country. It was an absolutely brilliant move on the part of Huey Newton and Bobby Seale to patrol the neighborhood with guns and law books, in other words, to "police the police." At the same time this strategy—admittedly also inspired by the emergence of guerrilla struggles in Cuba, liberation armies in southern Africa and the Middle East, and the successful resistance offered by the

[143]I borrow these ideas from João Costa Vargas.
[144] Kathleen Neal Cleaver, "Women, Power and Revolution," *New Political Science* 21 (1999), 231-236.
[145] Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin, "An interview on Futures of Black Radicalism," in *Futures of Black Radicalism* ed. Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (London: Verso, 2017), Location 4767 Kindle Edition.

> National Liberation Front in Vietnam—in retrospect, reflected a failure to recognize, as Audre Lorde put it, that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." In other words, the use of guns—even though primarily as symbols of resistance—conveyed the message that the police could be challenged effectively by relying on explicit policing strategies.[146]

Curiously we see that when asked about the relationship between the BPP and BLMM, Davis summons Lorde's words to call for the disarmament of both the police and Black social movements. Davis argues that the nonviolent approach of the BLM moment is more promising than a tradition of armed struggle that supposedly is located in bygone movement eras. For her, the police patrol strategies of counterveilance (and their threat of counter violence against the master-state) will not result in freedom, but the maintenance of domination.[147]

Tef Poe, a Black community organizer and musician from St. Louis, Missouri who witnessed the 2014 Ferguson uprisings characterizes the relationship between the Black Lives Matter Movement and a political praxis of Black self-defense differently. On a 2015 panel with prominent Black Studies activist-scholars he reflected on the meaning behind his remark to MSNBC reporter Chris Hayes that, "This isn't your mother's or your father's Civil Rights Movement." He explains,

> I wanted to be aggressive at the scene. I want you to know that if you're going to come to one of these communities where there's Black folks and you're going to pull your gun out and you're going to shoot, you will be met with resistance. This is what that resistance looks like. This is what it feels like. This is what it sounds like. We're going to curse at you. We're going to throw some stuff at you. We might even tip over a police car or two, depending on how we feel that day. But you will not just come into our

---

[146] Davis, "Futures," Location 4768 Kindle Edition.

[147] Interestingly enough, this same critique was posed to me by a former LAPD officer turned Irish historian during a university sponsored dissertation boot camp. Wasn't my support of Black self-defense merely perpetuating the very violence I sought to condemn?

> communities and gun people down and be met with nothing.[148]

He continues,

> So what I meant when I said that is, when the Panthers bore arms and they went to the state capitol, a lot of people didn't even know that those guns weren't even loaded. A lot of people don't study history to know that. And also there was a different timeframe. They had the same rifles that the police had. When the police show up to our communities now, they have the same weapons they take into Baghdad. But I'm supposed to meet you with a respectable statement?[149]

Despite a few apologetic and defensive gestures that soften or confuse his point, Tef Poe, informed by the Panther's tactics and strategies, insists that the war against Black communities must be refused. For Tef Poe, and the residents of Ferguson who did not meet the military occupation of their neighborhood 'with nothing,' this refusal can only be heard by the state if it is spoken in the language of political violence.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

This chapter is interested in examining how the legacy of the Panther patrols is being taken up during the post-Ferguson moment by scholars and activists. Are the panther patrols something that BLM should be turning toward or away from? Or, perhaps, putting aside the contradictions of the Panthers (Shakur 1987, Bukhari 2010) and any questions of accuracy regarding popular representations of the Party, this chapter wonders, what is the importance of counterveilance and counter-violence as organizing strategies during the BLM Movement? To answer this question, I engage two seemingly different projects: first, a growing body of scholarship that claims BLM will 'radicalize'

---

[148] Tef Poe, "Generations of Struggle." Panel Discussion with Percy Green, Robin D.G. Kelley, George Lipsitz, and Jamala Rogers. *Kalfou* 3, no. 1 (2016): 11.
[149] Ibid.

the Black Radical Tradition, and second, The Watchdogs, a collective of cop-watchers in Austin who are marginalized within Austin's Movement for Black Lives. The grounds for such a comparison are as follows. While I find the scholarly call to revisit Robinson's work and the Watchdog's anti-state approach to organizing very useful during the Black Lives Matter Movement moment, I wish to interrogate the way in which these scholars and activists instrumentalize the Panther Patrols for abolitionist, libertarian and anarchist ends.

Returning to the words of Davis, this chapter is also organized around a critical engagement with the antiracist maxim, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." We see how in the current political moment, the adage, taken from Audre Lorde's 1979 essay, has become shorthand for the political necessity of pacifism and an indictment of armed self-defense. I wish to challenge this popular interpretation of Lorde's motto. Rather than a manifesto against Black revolutionary desire, Lorde's essay is a critique of epistemic violence. Whereas Lorde is thinking about how feminist theory falls short of offering transformative social change when it fails to consider racism, this chapter analyzes the ways in which antiracist theory also circumscribes liberatory possibilities when it refuses to account for antiblackness. Again, Lorde is thinking about how feminism is used as a racist implement against Black women and nonblack WOC. I am encouraging the reader to think about how despite our intentions, the scholars and copwatchers under consideration may utilize antiracism as an antiblack implement against a Black revolutionary vanguard. In the next four ethnographic scenes, I present three canonical instruments of antiracist thought and the narrow parameters of change it

allows, or more precisely, the antiblack consequences that follow from it. As this portrait of contemporary antiracist thought emerges it becomes clear that the master's tools are not Black self-defense, but rather the radical left's dependence upon historical materialism, intersectionality, interest convergence theory, and the politics of recognition.

I begin by recounting Angela Davis' keynote lecture at UT Austin's inaugural Black Studies conference in 2017. During her address, Davis echoes her earlier points against Black autonomous struggle and rewrites the Black Radical Tradition as a kind of pacifist intersectional Marxism. Utilizing the work of Patrice Douglass, Kathleen Cleaver, and Frantz Fanon, I evaluate Davis' speech and the publishing boom that participates in her revisionism. Ultimately, I argue that the antiracist tools of intersectionality and historical materialism render an analysis of antiblackness impossible and distract from the urgency of a Black revolutionary ethic. Next, I share the origin story of the Watchdogs and consider the way both civil society and the state respond to the unlawful arrest of the organization's founder. I find that the Watchdog's origin story reveals the necessity of interest-convergence (Bell 2005) to galvanize any recognition of police brutality by the court or the general-public. I use Alves and Vargas's analysis of the national outrage in Brazil over law enforcement's violent response against white demonstrators during the 2013 Free Fare movement to argue that interest convergence is a tool of antiblackness that cannot serve the project of anti-antiblackness.

Then, I present an ethnographic vignette of a single stop the Watchdogs filmed during a late-night cop watch. Harkening back to our discussion in chapter one, here we have yet another scene of subjection. A young, likely indigent, Black man has been

caught breaking into a taco truck in attempts of finding something to eat. This display of Black suffering and his will to survive is met with the gratuity of lethal force by local law enforcement. Surprisingly, my fellow copwatchers are not that disturbed by the state and civil society's lust for punishment. Instead we use this stage of sufferance (Hartman 1997) to perform our own conflict with the state, and celebrate the supposed success of our activism. Avery Gordon's notion of haunting helps me reiterate chapter 1's argument that in the wake of slavery and its afterlife, the project of recognition is yet another master's tool. I conclude by reflecting on one last ethnographic moment that unfolds after a screening of Anna Deavere Smith's, *Twilight*, at Monkey Wrench Books, a small anarchist bookstore and organizing space. Amidst hand painted banners that urge revolt and tongue in cheek merchandise about killing cops, we watch scenes of Black urban uprising. During our discussion however, despite an interesting provocation offered by a young Black activist, the conversation centers around a collective empathy extended toward Reginald Denny and a shared horror at the rebels who wished him dead. I compare this moment with a similar scene of revolutionary Black joy and radical white anxiety from Frank Wilderson's essay, "Biko and the Problem of Presence." Finally, I argue that the both Watchdogs and the BLMM publishing boom reveal antiracism's revulsion toward Black insurgency and the ethical paucity of an Abolitionist political praxis.

"BLACK MATTERS: THE FUTURE OF BLACK SCHOLARSHIP AND ACTIVISM"

At the end of September of 2016, The University of Texas at Austin hosted their inaugural Black Studies conference. The title of the event gestured towards the movement for Black Lives, and one of the draws was a discussion between Michael Brown's mother, Lezley McSpadden and her childhood friend Drea Brown, then a doctoral student in the Black Studies Department. The keynote speaker was Angela Davis. Her lecture centered around Cedric Robinson's notion of the Black Radical Tradition. She made the case for a, "truly radical" Black Radical Tradition. One that would be transformed by feminist and queer theory. Although the state and racial capitalism were to be the subject of her abolitionist critique, this project of radicalizing Black Radicalism positioned a certain Black Power political praxis as the un-radical tradition. First, Davis pit the Black Panther Party strategy of, "policing the police" against the contemporary abolitionist struggle as something that perpetuates, "law enforcement tactics." Second, she criticized binary racial schemas which she attributed to the same movement era when, "Black was Black and white was white." Finally, she implied that the Black Power turn away from formal politics, toward autonomous organizing was uncomplicated, self-important, and downright dangerous, "You know, we should have learned by now that the arena of electoral politics militates against the expression of radical political perspectives [applause], but this does not mean that we urge our communities not to vote! [applause] As a matter of fact, we have devoted too much energy to the struggle for voting rights not

go to the polls [applause].”[150] *She continued attending to the importance of voting especially in light of the upcoming election between Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump, “I have serious problems with the other candidate, but I’m not so narcissistic as to say that I can’t bring myself to vote for her.” The audience cheered. Ultimately, Davis ended her speech with a call for a new independent party, supposedly inspired by the Black Radical Tradition, that embraces a anticapitalist-feminist-pro-immigrant-queer stance and a framework that addresses environmental justice, food sovereignty, and animal cruelty.*

Contractually, the organizers of the conference were not allowed to record Davis’ talk. However, since audience members live tweeted the address, some of her remarks, most controversially her tacit endorsement of Hilary Clinton, circulated on blogs and social media.[151] *Many were incredulous that Davis would support another Clinton Administration when the first was so ruthlessly committed to the criminalization of Blackness. Eventually one of the conference organizers, Minkah Makalani, rose to defend Davis.*[152] *He argued that the outrage, “painfully misrepresents her remarks about the upcoming Presidential election, and which far too many people have taken as truth.”*[153]

---

[150] Jonubian, “Angela Davis. On the current election,” *Instagram*, September 30, 2016, https://www.instagram.com/p/BK_7K8rAorX/ (accessed November 11, 2018).
[151] Kirsten West Sivali, “Angela Davis: I am not so narcissistic to say I cannot bring myself to vote for Hilary Clinton,” The Root.com, https://www.theroot.com/angela-davis-i-am-not-so-narcissistic-to-say-i-cannot-1790857069 (accessed November 11, 2018).
[152] Minkah Makalani, “Angela Davis and the Black Radical Tradition in the Era of Black Lives Matter,” AAIHS, October 2, 2016, https://www.aaihs.org/angela-davis-and-the-black-radical-tradition-in-the-era-of-black-lives-matter/ (accessed November 11, 2018).
[153] Ibid.

He insisted that her genealogy of the BRT and call for a new political party were the most significant take-a-ways of the event. In Makalani's own words,

> *Davis spent nearly 43 minutes on the Black Radical Tradition, offering what we might call, in contemporary parlance, a decolonial view of what our political present (BLM, M4BL) makes available for that tradition. While the Black Panther Party (BPP) could take the brilliant approach of policing the Oakland police with guns and law books, Davis pointed out that in doing so, the BPP accepted policing as a legitimate practice for a liberation struggle. Now, we are at a point where we can reject policing altogether, and call for the abolition of police and prisons.*[154]

As an audience member sitting in the cavernous –and packed- Lady Bird Johnson Auditorium, I experienced Davis's call and response with the audience (we punctuated almost every remark with bursts of applause or laughter) as a giant and energetic celebration. The narrative arc of her speech was nothing short of triumphant: although she had spent the majority of her life struggling against criminalization and the punishment system, she felt that something has finally begun to give-- that abolitionist ideas are beginning to take. While she will eventually pass without having witnessed prison abolition in her lifetime, she finds tremendous solace in the fact that the struggle will continue. As evidence of this teleology –she notes her appearance on a billboard at UCLA where she has returned as a Regents Lecturer, sponsored by the very university governing body that fired her in 1970 for her radical politics. Yet woven into this same speech are the workings of enormous loss: the dispossession of Black led self-determining efforts- both their theory and practice.

POLICING BLACK RADICAL THOUGHT

[154] Ibid.

Davis's speech, and Makalani's defense of it, mark an astounding reversal of Cedric Robinson's thesis in *Black Marxism*, where, based on extensive archival work Robinson traces a genealogy of slave revolts, or what he calls, The Black Radical Tradition (hereafter BRT). Robinson's thesis is threefold. First, racism and nationalism anticipated and helped organize global capitalism.[155] In other words, racism was, "rooted not in a particular era, but in civilization itself."[156] Therefore, the power relations of slavery were not primarily forged through forced labor, but through the creation of the "Negro." Second, slave resistance should not be understood through the lens of historical materialism as the first working class (Woods 1998) but as the BRT—a wholly different program of revolutionary change. In his own words, "This was a revolutionary consciousness that proceeded from the whole historical experience of Black people and not merely from the social formations of capitalist slavery or the relations of production of colonialism."[157] Black revolt presents an alternative paradigm from which to think about and move against Black suffering. Robinson defines the BRT as the enslaved's, "negation of western civilization."[158] Robinson's archival data also suggests that the BRT was not concerned with the materiality of the question, "what comes next?" just the total rejection of enslavement (Robinson 2018). And, "Unlike Marxism [where] victory is inevitable, eventually, in Black radicalism it is not."[159] He continues, "It is about a kind

---

[155] Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 9.
[156] Ibid., 28.
[157] Ibid., 169.
[158] Ibid., 73.
[159] Cedric Robinson, "Preface," in *Futures of Black Radicalism* ed. Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (London: Verso, 2017), Location 193 Kindle Edition.

of resistance that does not promise triumph or victory at the end, only liberation."[160] When BRT was realized, this refusal looked like, "the palmares, the Bush negro settlements, and at its heights, Haiti."[161] When it was not otherwise possible, traces of the BRT can be found in autonomous epistemologies and spiritual practices such as obeah, voodoo, myalism, and pocomania.

Third, Robinson argues that it requires enormous epistemic violence in order to understand the BRT differently. He explains that since Black radicalism poses such a profound threat to modernity itself, "The very circumstance of its appearance has required that it be misinterpreted and diminished."[162] He argues that subsequent distortion and repression of, "the memory of Black rebelliousness to slavery," was part of the dehumanizing project of racist historiography. Subsequently, even Black historians did not trace the roots of Black resistance back to these founding moments. Instead they largely adopted the founding nationalist myths and wrote Black history not to expose these narratives as ideological, but to incite nonblack recognition and Black incorporation into the national project. In Robinson's words, "When their historiography did begin, it was not so much a bold initiative against the certainties of nationalist and racialist histories as a plea for sympathy."[163] Which is too say Black Studies abandoned the Black Radical Tradition for the project of integration. Even the Marxist Black intelligentsia were complicit in this violence, having bought into the now hegemonic idea that global

---

[160] Ibid., Location 195 Kindle Edition.
[161] Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 169.
[162] Ibid., 1.
[163] Ibid., 190.

Black revolutionary thought originates in European traditions and thus they betrayed the specificity of Black oppression and its antilogics.[164] Parenthetically, Robinson too finds himself implicated in this epistemic violence. While the BRT is clearly a longstanding commitment to armed insurgency, even Robinson himself feels compelled to apologize for or downplay this ethic assuring the reader that, "Blacks have seldom employed the level of violence that they (the Westerners) understood the situation required."[165]

Davis' speech and its defense are characteristic of a larger trend among abolitionist scholars and activists that rewrite and repurpose Robinson's work in the Black Lives Matter Movement moment. It is a repurposing that Robinson seems to tacitly endorse as evidenced by his involvement in the edited volume, *Futures of Black Radicalism*, released posthumously in 2017. And yet, the way his work is being taken up in this moment represents a total reversal of his three interventions outlined above. First, while Robinson asserts the roots of Black suffering as predating capitalism, these scholars utterly refuse this thesis. Instead they misappropriate Robinson's terminology of racial capitalism to offer a kind of updated, intersectional Marxism. Davis's remarks are representative, "The concept associated with Black Marxism that I find most productive and most potentially transformative is the concept of racial capitalism…Global capitalism cannot be adequately comprehended if the racial dimensions of capitalism is ignored."[166] Meaning, Black suffering is principally a position of the exploited laborer or subaltern

---

[164] Although Robinson draws the reader's attention to when activist intellectuals such as DuBois, Wright, and James have wrestled with and/or reconsidered the utility of historical materialism in relationship to the global Black freedom movement.
[165] Ibid., 168.
[166] Davis, "Futures," Kindle Location 4875.

and not the ontological status of the slave.[167] In Davis schema, racism and capitalism are, "co-constitutive" (Davis 2017). Yet Robinson's argument is that "racialism" or antiblackness, having already shifted the ontology of the world, "would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent of capitalism."[168] So it is not capitalism that fundamentally determines the fate of the Black diaspora, for Robinson, but antiblackness.

Furthermore, they reject the dualism created by an antiblack ontology and scoff at a past ethos that took such a dualism seriously, "when black was black and white was white." In their eyes, "there is nothing narrowly black about the BRT" (Davis 2015), and "the 'black' in the BRT is a politics" (Lipsitz 2017) that will facilitate everyone's freedom. Second, since they reject the particularity of antiblackness, they reject the imperative of Black revolt. And although resistance matters (Kelley 2014), it does not look like counterveilance or counter violence which supposedly mirrors state surveillance/violence. Instead of representing the slave's violent refusal of western civilization, this BRT 2.0 becomes, "a collection of cultural, intellectual, action-oriented labor aimed at disrupting social, political, economic, and cultural norms originating in anticolonial and antislavery efforts."[169] Black revolution then is sanitized and comes to signify a multiracial nonviolent movement committed to reforming modernity. Thus, *Black Marxism* is transformed into a treatise against Black autonomy. Finally, the threat

---

[167] For me, this revisionism is also captured in the image of Robin Kelley delivering a lecture entitled, "Revisiting Black Marxism, in the wake of BLM" at table that has been draped with a banner reading, "The Future is Socialism." Or, more subtly in a University of Chicago job announcement that warns, "While we are very much open to various approaches to the study of race and capitalism, we would not be willing to entertain scholars whose work overwhelmingly focuses on either race or capitalism largely to the exclusion of the other."

[168] Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 2.

[169] Charlene Carruthers, *Unapologetic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), x.

of dispossession facing the BLMM is not the disappearance of revolutionary thought, but the erasure of women's participation in the BRT (Davies 2016) and the loss of a Black Queer Feminist Lens (Carruthers 2018). A "truly radical" Black Radical Tradition, in the words of Davis, is not so much a revolutionary stance toward the state or modernity, but a praxis that is informed by an intersectional feminism.

Davis instrumentalizes the Panther patrols to crack down on Black autonomous desire in the post Ferguson moment. To do so she uses two canonical tools of antiracist theory: intersectionality and historical materialism. As mentioned above, one aspect of the call to 'update' the BRT centers Robinson's blatant omission of Black women from his opus, *Black Marxism*. This line of thinking suggests that Robinson's singular focus on Black men (W.E.B. DuBois, C.L.R. James and Richard Wright) would be improved through a consideration of how Black women were also grappling with the explanatory power of Marxism for the condition of the Black diaspora. However, I wish to problematize this call to incorporate women into the historical account as architects of the BRT. Certainly, this is a valid and necessary demand to make on movement historians, but it also seems to mobilize a curious reversal of concerns moving us from ontology to gender. Patrice Douglas calls our attention to another instance of this transition. She notes that the grassroots articulations of the BLMM overwhelmingly privileged the lethal policing of Black men and boys, and thus compelled activists to issue the feminist correctives, "Black Girls Matter," and "say her name" (Sexton 2016). Albeit legitimate interventions, Douglass is less interested in this additive move and instead wishes to call

our attention to the type of analysis it occasions. Meditating on the murder of Korryn Gaines by a Baltimore SWAT team, Douglass writes,

> Rather than asserting why Korryn should be seen as exemplary to the concerns of the political dissent wagered against law enforcement practices, I argue it is more critical to hone into what theoretical and political maneuvers force state violence against Black women into discursive boxes that insist on employing the logic of subjectivity to account for the object status of their suffering.[170]

To paraphrase Douglass's argument, the counter-hegemonic framework of intersectional feminism positions the murder of Korryn Gaines as an equally representative example of antiblack state violence to the more well-known assassinations of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner and the list goes on and on (and on and on). However, for Douglass, "This shift illustrates how Black death animates the discourse of gender violence while rendering the relationship between gender and antiblackness void through its assumptive underpinnings."[171] Douglass argues that gender is not an applicable or useful category from which to understand antiblack state violence when *un-gendering* violence is constitutive of captivity (Spillers 1984), that is, when Black gender is *indissociable from violence* (Hartman 1997). Applying a gendered lens to antiblack violence assumes that Blackness exists outside of objecthood. Therefore, Douglas objects to the way the analytic tool of gender renders an analysis of antiblackness impossible. Instead she proposes a *Black feminism for the dead and dying* that stays committed to an ontological analysis of state violence against Black communities.

---

[170] Patrice Douglass, "Black Feminist Theory for the Dead and Dying," *Theory and Event*, 21 (2018): 110.
[171] Ibid.

Kathleen Cleaver also calls out the way that conversations around antiblackness and anti-antiblackness are often redirected through 'the gender question.' As a Black Panther Party organizer, she was familiar with the, "What is the woman's role in the Black Panther Party?" line of inquiry. After the FBI's war against the Panthers, and Cleaver's transition to academic spaces she continues to be fixed by this query. She explains,

> Nowadays, the questions are more sophisticated: 'What were the gender issues in the Black Panther Party? 'Wasn't the Black Panther Party a bastion of sexism?' But nobody seems to pose the question that I had: 'Where can I go to get involved in the revolutionary struggle?' It seems to me that part of the genesis of the gender question, and this is only an opinion, lies in the way it deflects attention from confronting the revolutionary critique our organization made of the larger society, and it turns it inward to look at what type of dynamics and social conflicts characterized the organization. [172]

Cleaver also encourages a level of skepticism about the workings of the gender question in the face of Black communities on the move. Cleaver argues that while the BPP obviously grappled with sexism, the popular notions of the party as a boy's club and 'a bastion of sexism' is generated largely by the bias of male reporters/photographers and the workings of Cointelpro. What's more, the result of these critiques is a diversion from, or even discrediting of the BPP's analysis of the empire state and their proposals for how to both revolt and survive pending revolution (she names revolt, assimilation, and autonomy as contradictory, but integral organizing strategies). Controversially it appears that the demand to think gender provokes a counterrevolutionary refusal to think anti-antiblackness. Cleaver and Douglas invite me to ask, what are the costs of this approach

[172] Cleaver 232.

as seen in Davis's speech? What are the cost of her theoretical assumptions? I argue that intersectionality, in this instance, the move to gender antiblackness, writes over Black particularity (Douglass 2018) and subsequently distracts from a revolutionary ethic (Cleaver 1999).

Davis and other abolitionists, also wield intersectionality to condemn the Black Radical Tradition as autonomous praxis (vis a vis the Panther patrols). They seek to recuperate the BRT by imposing on it a Black Queer Feminist lens. In the words of BYP100 founder Charlene Carruthers, "As I define it, the Black Queer feminist (BQF) lens is a political praxis (practice and theory) based in Black feminist and LGBTQ traditions and knowledge, through which people and groups seek to bring their full selves into the process of dismantling all systems of oppression."[173] While Carruthers highlights the embodied nature of intersectionality, meaning the way a single person simultaneously occupies various relationships to power and state violence depending on their race, nationality, immigration status, gender, sexuality, ability, age, etc. Historian Barbara Ransby addresses the political implications of an intersectional lens for the BLMM,

> the movement is politically and ideologically grounded in the US-based Black feminist tradition, a tradition that embraces an intersectional analysis while insisting on the interlocking and interconnected nature of different systems of oppression; advocates the importance of women's group–centered leadership; supports LGBTQIA issues; and seeks to center the most marginalized and vulnerable members of the Black community in terms of the language and priorities of the movement.[174]

For activists and movement historians such as Carruthers and Ransby operating under the schema of intersectionality, state violence consists of various systems of intersecting or

---

[173] Carruthers 10.

[174] Barbara Ransby, *Making All Black Lives Matter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), Kindle Locations 80-84.

interlocking oppressions, i.e. white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks 2000); thus, this violence impacts *everyone*, albeit to different degrees. The intersectionality of struggles (Davis 2017), then, invites everyone to build solidarity and work together to end a shared oppression. This intersectional approach seems to be saying that the BLMM is only legitimate if it leads to a global struggle to end all forms of social suffering. In the words of Davis, "I would never argue that it's possible to look at Black freedom in a narrow sense."[175] Rather than revealing the power relations of slavery and the dualism between master and slave, these thinkers transform antiblack police violence into a symptom of, "racial capitalism." Consequently, they can set aside Robinson's painstaking archival work to assert that, "the Black radical tradition is related not simply to Black people but to all people who are struggling for freedom."[176] Harkening back to Davis' keynote, an intersectional approach to the BLMM argues that any "narrow" focus on Black freedom is "narcissistic" and Black revolt must be set aside for nonviolent coalitional organizing.

Reflecting on the (supposed) centrality of intersectionality to the BLMM I am reminded of Fanon's critique of Sartre in *Black Skin, White Masks*. In Sartre's exegesis of the Negritude movement, he argues that Black consciousness is valuable in that it represents a critical juncture in Black political awakening. The highest form of political consciousness for Sartre is the yoking of Black oppression with exploitation and the

---

[175] Ibid. 604.
[176] Angela Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), Location 599 Kindle Edition.

subsequent dawning of a shared proletarian struggle among workers of all races. Here is Sartre as quoted by Fanon,

> The Negro, as we have said, creates an anti-racist racism. He does not at all wish to dominate the world; he wishes the abolition of racial privileges wherever they are found; he affirms his solidarity with the oppressed of all colors. At a blow the subjective, existential ethnic notion of *Negritude* 'passes,' as Hegel would say, into the objective, positive, exact notion of the *proletaria*t. "For Césaire," says Senghor, "the 'White' symbolizes capital, as the Negro, labor….Among the black men of his race, it is the struggle of the world proletariat which he sings." This is easier to say than work out. And without doubt it is not by hazard that the most ardent apostles of Negritude are at the same time militant Marxists.[177]

Like Sartre, Davis and the other BRT revisionists, recognize Black suffering, but only as evidence of a shared oppression under capitalism or "racial capitalism." Fanon argues that such a misrecognition of Black suffering requires a profound misunderstanding of the world's antiblack racial schema. He writes, "Jean-Paul Sartre forgets that the black man suffers in his body quite differently from the white man."[178] In an attendant footnote Fanon explains that under this historical racial schema, whites hold the position of masters. Which is to say, he insists on the inadequacy of a materialist analysis of blackness when Black suffering is a position of objecthood, of being for the Other, whereas the proletariat is one of exploited labor power. Likewise, Fanon critiques Sartre's (and by extension Davis') willingness to recognize and promote Black consciousness, but only as a latent stage of class consciousness. Fanon contends that, "black consciousness is immanent in itself. I am note a potentiality of something; I am

[177] Ibid.,111-112.
[178] Ibid., 117.

fully what I am. I do not have to look for the universal."[179] Fanon continues, "While I, in a paroxysm of experience and rage, was proclaiming this, he reminded me," referring to Sartre, "that my negritude was nothing but a weak stage."[180] In summation, along the lines of Robinson, Fanon allows me to argue that an intersectional lens operates as a master's tool in that it constructs a false equivalence between Black suffering and exploitation, and ergo subsumes the specificity of a Black radical analysis with a Marxist analysis of power and resistance.

ORIGIN STORY OF THE WATCHDOGS

The origin story of the Watchdogs, a grassroots cop-watching collective in Austin, Texas, begins early on New Year's Day of 2012. Kyle Wolff had been out at downtown bars with friends that evening, but is sober and acting at the group's designated driver. On their way home from the 6th street district, Kyle pulls into a 7-11 for gas and comes upon a DUI stop in progress. The passenger of the stopped car, a white woman, is being treated roughly by police. She cries out. Kyle asks the young woman if she is ok and she pleads with him to record what is happening to her. When Kyle begins filming the incident with his blackberry phone, the officer retaliates against him ultimately tackling him to the ground. Kyle is subsequently charged with assaulting an officer, a felony offense which carries a penalty of up to 4 years in prison. Kyle places a post on Craigslist asking for witnesses to come forward and luckily, they do. In fact, another witness at the scene had filmed his arrest. Local and national media run with Kyle's story

[179] Ibid., 114.
[180] Ibid., 116.

and the news coverage results in an enormous out pouring of support. People across Austin and surrounding areas form a legal defense fund that raises enough money to cover Kyle's trial expenses. As Austinites continue to rally around Kyle's victimization by police, he also receives encouragement from survivors of police brutality. These are primarily Black and brown residents who tell him the stories of their own rape, assault, and framing at the hands of APD—as well as the impunity granted to their abusers. They encourage Kyle to fight his charges in court, hoping that because of his racial and class privilege as a nonblack West Point graduate and Iraqi war veteran with no criminal record, his case at least, will get justice. Outraged by the realization that the police do not function as he once believed them to, and buoyed by the support of both an active libertarian community and victims of police brutality, Kyle founds the Watchdogs.

I have heard the Watchdog origin story many times whether reading about it in the press, asking older members to recount it during our patrols, or listening to Kyle tell it during his regular guest lectures to the UGS course Blackness and Mass Incarceration. There are two things about it which stand out to me. First, Kyle readily admits that before his arrest, he did not have a critique of the criminal justice system. During his visits, he usually put it as follows, "most people don't care until they've been impacted." Second, Kyle is quick to explain how his positionality contributed to his ability to 1) avoid a harsh sentence and 2) compel a portion of Austin's civil society to believe/denounce his suffering. Kyle knows that while his suffering was recognized and redressed (a judge ruled his first amendment rights had been violated) there is no justice for the people of color that tell him their terrifying stories. That is, he utilizes a racial analysis to make

sense of his arrest and subsequent legal victory. While Kyle's analytic lens often gives way to a POC paradigm, thus obscuring the specificity of antiblackness, he does seem to be acknowledging the *gratuitous* violence that Black communities in Austin are subject to as opposed to the *contingent* violence that occurred when he transgressed the symbolic order and recognized the criminality of the police.[181] Even while Kyle will say glib things at know your rights training like, "you have no rights," a statement that would conceal *who* specifically has no rights, on another level, he does know that there are profound differences between himself and Black victims of police violence.

I wish to examine Kyle's astute insight that 'we,' that is, nonblacks, only care about forms of antiblackness when we are victimized by its institutions and processes. Put differently, until nonblacks become the collateral damage of antiblackness, civil society fails to perceive a problem and authorize the state to respond. Kyle's insight echoes Derrick Bell's interest-convergence theory. Bell, a legal scholar and former civil rights litigator, argues that the state and civil society operate under a series of what he calls *silent covenants*. *Interest-convergence* is one such unspoken pact; a tacit agreement that there is no form of Black sufferance in the United States egregious enough to animate massive outrage and state-sanctioned intervention. That is, the antiblack state or nonblack civil society must feel that something is at stake for *them* in order to act.[182] Bell writes the formula as follows,

---

[181] I borrow this point about contingent v. gratuitous violence from Frank Wilderson, *Red, White and Black* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010):81. For an extended engagement with this idea see Alves and Vargas, "On Deaf Ears."

[182] For further evidence of this covenant see Moon-kie Jung, Beneath the Surface of White Supremacy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015) and Alves and Vargas, "On Deaf Ears."

Justice for blacks vs. racism = racism
Racism vs. obvious perceptions of white self-interest = justice for blacks[183]

To evidence he thesis Bell gives the example of the supreme court ruling in Brown v. Board. Bell points out that apartheid was not a moral dilemma for the U.S. Segregation only presented a problem during the Cold War when the nation's investment in its image as, "the self-proclaimed exemplar of freedom and democracy," was undermined by an international outcry against lynchings.[184] Bell argues that the court's decision offered a symbolic victory to blacks, "while in fact, giving a new, improved face to the nation's foreign policy and responding to charges of blatant racial bias at home."[185] Notwithstanding this silent covenant, and what Bell elsewhere theorizes as *the permanence of racism* (Bell 1992), he calls on antiracist activists to *forge racial fortuity*, meaning strategically making the cost of antiblackness appear too high for whites (and in this dissertation's schema, nonblacks). Kyle seems similarly resigned to this position that the political possibility for transformative change is yoked to displays of nonblack suffering.

Related to Kyle's second insight, that his nonblackness renders his victimization by police legible to the courts and civil society, the Watchdogs as a group also holds an awareness of how our nonblackness positions us in a distinct relationship to state violence. During interviews with watchdog members, they consistently referred to the idea of our embodied nonblackness as a 'shield.' Meaning, we did not feel scared or

[183] Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), 59.
[184] Ibid., 60.
[185] Ibid., 67.

threatened by law enforcement on cop-watches.[186] Which is *not* to say that our transgression of the hegemonic social order doesn't garner the attention of the police, it does. The Watchdogs are subject to surveillance and retaliation. For example, after numerous death threats Kyle moved outside of Austin city limits. He also sometimes sleeps with a gun. Even in his new home, his BLM yard signs are always stolen or run over with a car. Copwatchers are regularly arrested or fined for cop-watching as an intimidation tactic and an inconvenience. While copwatching is a constitutionally protected activity, and the jury is likely to rule in your favor, APD arrests activists because, as the saying goes, "you can beat the rap, but you can't beat the ride." Personally, I have witnessed one arrest; attended at least three trials of cop-watchers; and performed 'jail support' for yet another (we waited outside Travis County Jail with their family and snacks until they were released). Officers even call Kyle by name when we are on cop-watches. Once on sixth street I witnessed a cop turn to Kyle and ask him, "you still live at…" and proceeded to recite his address. Chief Art Acevedo has called the Watchdogs a terrorist organization in a press conference. APD brass 'encourages' Black activists not to work with us. Once, with the Accountability Alliance I attended a day long, "Community Use of Force Training" at APD's "public safety campus," where we were taken through various, "scenario based trainings," designed to force a split-second decision about whether or not to deploy deadly force (using a pellet gun). In the final obstacle course, there appeared a faux Watchdog that would scream in your face and

[186] I joined the Watchdogs under this very pretense. June, an early leader of the Black Lives Matter Austin chapter suggested I join the Watchdogs because I am white. She explained that she could not afford to copwatch as a Black woman because it would put her and her family at risk. So, to a certain extent this is a view shared by nonblack and Black organizers.

flash a bright camera light in your eyes. Afterwards many complained about the copwatcher and one community member even joked about his desire to shoot the Watchdog.

All that to say that in no way do I aim to downplay the extent of the police's hatred and awareness of the Watchdogs. However, unlike the Panther Patrols that operated under the threat of death, in Huey P. Newton's words, "Each day we went forth fully aware that we might not come home or see each other ever again,"[187] and, "When the party was first organized, I did not think I would live for more than one year after we began; I thought we would be blasted off the streets."[188] The Watchdogs are not burdened by a sense of imminent injury of death. Under the Watchdog schema, we are a social formation that does not magnetize bullets (to borrow Wilderson's formulation), therefore we can safely monitor the police on behalf of vulnerable Black communities. We feel empowered, safe and protected by our nonblackness. Yet despite this tacit acknowledgement of our ontological relationship to violence, it does not radically alter our understanding of the world and how to dismantle the state. Instead we paradoxically accept the "shield" of nonblackness as an antiracist tool that can be wielded to undermine antiblackness. So, while I agree with Bell that these covenants need to be acknowledged, I disagree with the idea, that these profoundly violent logics can somehow be manipulated for the benefit of the diaspora. Can white victimization by police and the outrage it produces actually be harnessed for good? Can those vulnerable only to

[187] Huey P. Newton, Revolutionary Suicide (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), 130.
[188] Ibid. 196.

contingent violence act as a kind of vanguard class on behalf of Black communities facing the gratuity of terror? I argue that the tools of racial fortuity and contingency cannot be used to undo to fruits of antiblackness.

To do so, I turn to activist anthropologists Jaime Amparo Alves and João H. Costa Vargas. In their article, "On Deaf Ears," Alves and Vargas examine the national (i.e. white) catharsis that resulted from a spectacular display of police violence against white middle class demonstrators protesting bus fare hikes in major Brazilian cities. Like Kyle's arrest, but to a much larger scale, these images of white pain energized a sense of public outrage and attempts by the state to redress their crimes. Alves and Vargas argue that we should interpret this recognition of police brutality as follows,

> Our primary contention is that we cannot understand white victimization by the police-and the outrage it produces- without taking into consideration two foundational, dialectical aspects of the regime of rights: complicity and disavowal. White vulnerability to this specific form of state violence- a form of violence that is contingent and produces collective horror – reflects not only the disavowal of black suffering, but also the strengthening of the white public sphere.[189]

Alves and Vargas reason that this moment in contemporary Brazilian politics is telling in the way it reveals how, "Black inhumanity and white pain are dialectically produced."[190] Meaning, the recognition of white pain requires both the production and denial of Black pain. When the white Brazilian or central Texan public understands an instance of police violence to be in excess of the institution's duties, they are, by extension, condoning the genocidal levels of violence the Brazilian and U.S. police have always inflicted upon Black neighborhoods. Just as the will-full subject requires the will-less object under slavery (Hartman 1997), these post-emancipation U.S. and Brazilian citizens (and their

[189] Jaime Amparo Alves and João Costa Vargas, "On Deaf Ears," *Identities* (2015), 1.
[190] Ibid., 3.

legible suffering/demands) require the Black noncitizen (and their illegible suffering/demands).

Facing civil society's *ontological dependence* on Black suffering and its disavowal (Alves and Vargas 2015), I cannot in good faith agree with Kyle's claim that animating nonblack outrage can somehow help keep Black communities safe. The very purpose of nonblack outrage is to sanction antiblack state violence and enliven a parasitic subjectivity. Nor can I support the notion that nonblackness can be wielded as a protective shield from state violence in order to effectively speak truth to power and do good in the world.[191] This assumes something about nonblackness that Bell, Alves and Vargas find to be untrue. I find it curious that while Bell wholly refuses to deny antiblackness, and while the Watchdogs acknowledge the contingency of violence, neither Bell nor my fellow activists carry that analysis. Neither of us propose or engage in a project of *anti-antiblackness* (Vargas 2018) that would bring about what Bell calls, "transcendent change." Instead we continue to paradoxically tinker with the tools of antiblackness to examine and remedy the fruits of antiblackness. If these tools of antiblackness result in anything my interlocutors would consider a win (e.g. our film of an incident is used in court and helps someone beat their rap), Lorde reminds us that these are only the most-narrow possibilities of change. It bears mentioning that this is not a dynamic unique to the eccentricities of the Watchdogs. This is an approach at the heart of the BLMM and contemporary antiracism: the attempt to bait nonblack publics with the

[191] This logic was also performed during a BLM die-in organized by Black UT undergraduates in response to Darren Wilson verdict. Nonblack students knelt in a "protective ring" around Black demonstrators.

recognition of their social suffering in hopes that they will in turn recognize and work toward Black liberation. Take Alicia Garza's widely cited aphorism, "When Black people get free, everybody gets free,"[192] or the ubiquitous chant in Austin's BLMM, "All lives matter when Black Lives Matter!"

In section IV I will hypothesize why the Watchdogs and perhaps other nonblack antiracist activists are reluctant to imagine transcendent change. The following section scrutinizes the politics of recognition as the fourth and final master's tool that threatens the Movement for Black Lives.

PATROLLING

Fall 2016

We are on foot along 6th street, an over-policed party district ---keeping our eyes open for police activity. Jeremy and I notice a scuffle happening in an empty parking lot about a block away. Police are already there and order the crowd to disperse---pepper spraying those that do not immediately comply. Folks begin to flee. We witness a young unarmed Black man running away from police (as per their orders to disperse). But Police proceed to hunt him down and then taze him in the back. He collapses to the ground, his head barely missing the curb. I capture the whole thing on camera. A police officer demands I back away and when I refuse, he shoves me backwards two or three times. Jeremy jumps in between us, cursing out the officer. He spends the rest of the night

---

[192] Alicia Garza, "A Herstory of the Black Lives Matter Movement," *The Feminist Wire* October 7, 2014 https://thefeministwire.com/2014/10/blacklivesmatter-2/?fbclid=IwAR0T77CvhSGebWrzIYl9LgfuLwSqdueWaoin-qAU4p7prE_uopU3gs9MlWs#.VDQAMDSVgqQ.twitter.

boasting about his interaction with the cop to other watchdog members and keeps asking me if I'm ok.

Summer 2018

It's almost 2am and we're winding through the east side, driving northbound on Airport Blvd. We haven't seen much (aside from the time we came across Ken Casaday, the police union president, conducting a traffic stop. "Sorry it wasn't more interesting, guys," he says, taunting us).[193] *Dennis suggests we turn in it. He lives in Taylor, and has a long drive home ahead, with a car that has not been very dependable lately. Kyle and I agree. I start to drive back to the 24-hour diner where we always meet before and after each cop watch. Secretly I hope we'll come across a stop. A few hundred feet later we see almost a dozen police cars on the right. They have shut down Springdale Road. I pull into an auto shop lot that hosts a taco truck on the corner. As we get out, I realize that there are at least a half dozen APD officers training their weapons on the taco truck.*

The officers try to scare us off (by acting like they have our interests at heart), and advise us to make sure we are positioned behind something, cautioning that they know someone is inside the taco truck, but they don't know if they're armed. Dennis is recording live onto the social media platform Periscope, using a kind of selfie-stick or tripod to hoist his camera high. He provides a running commentary of the scenario to online viewers. We film the officers for an hour—the time it takes them to break down the metal door down with the help of firefighters and a private contractor. Never once do the

[193] The watchdogs have filmed Casaday beating a handcuffed man on 6th street. Casaday also filmed with the Watchdogs once, before my time, as an undercover spy.

officers lower their weapons. Periodically they shout at the person inside to keep their arms raised. Some latinx families park their cars across the street to ogle. The owners of the taco truck arrive at the scene. Around 3 am the fire department rips off the metal grate and breaks down the door the trailer. A young Black man comes out. He is arrested and patted down. EMS checks for injuries. Apparently before we arrived APD had thrown a smoke bomb type device into the trailer and they anticipated his wounds. The young man is not wearing a belt, and as he is handled by the authorities his pants keep falling- down, exposing his body to all the onlookers.

As we prepare to leave Dennis shouts out something along the lines of, "You can tell Casaday we ***did*** *get our action tonight!" We make the short trip back to the diner and unpack what we just saw—having not spoken much while filming. I feel depressed. I was overwhelmed by the outrageous display of lethal force for such a minor property crime; the desperation of the 'crime' in question, and the humiliation of the capture. But Dennis and Kyle are buzzing, upbeat. They think that tonight evidences a change in APD's behavior. They seem to think that as a result of our cop watching efforts, APD has become less violent -- that they use more restraint with both the general public and with cop-watchers.*

THE STORY OF A HAT

While I would echo Kyle in saying, "I don't believe cop-watching is a way to stop police abuse," I respect the Watchdog's attempts to organize outside the realm of petitioning the state. There is also part of me that appreciates *the potentiality* of our

infinitesimally small gesture of showing up at a police stop in progress to let the person being detained know that we care about them and want to keep them safe (whether or not we have the power or will to do so). I think for example, of the night we "de-arrested" a middle-aged homeless Black woman on Cameron Road. Her younger white companion had called the police accusing her of stealing three dollars. When we arrived at the scene, Kyle took 5 dollars out of his wallet and gave it to the officers who then let her go. Or the evening we filmed an interracial couple getting their car searched off of Georgian Drive in the Rundberg neighborhood for over an hour by an extremely hostile white cop who told the youth, "a Black man driving a Cadillac is probably a drug dealer." I remember worrying that the officer would plant drugs on them and thinking the stop could have easily resulted in violence or arrest had we not been there. There was also the cop-watch we conducted in the Montopolis neighborhood where we pulled up to a sobriety test being conducted in an HEB parking lot. Lisa, a young Black woman who survived a SWAT raid on her home, reassured the young queer latina being detained, "we're here to help you! We just want to make sure you are safe!" it wasn't typically what Kyle said, but I felt so relieved when she said it. It made me think of the Panther patrols and how this work could be motivated by both a love of the people and a hatred of the pigs, as my interlocutors would say. It felt like, this was but a kernel of an idea of what movement work could look like. That is, Black communities across the diaspora radically reimagining ways to, "protect and serve each other," to borrow the Watchdog motto.

That being said, the vignettes I share also raise critical questions about the implications of nonblacks bearing witness to Black pain. As I have explored in the

previous two chapters, I am troubled here by how bearing witnessing to Black suffering fails to animate a sustained meditation on antiblack violence. Rather, the pursuit and torture of a young Black man is almost immediately displaced by Jeremy and my own bombastic stand-off with the police officer. Or think about how filming a grotesque display of gratuitous violence quickly slips into a celebration of the efficacy of our anti-state activism. Kyle and Dennis's interpretation of the taco truck incident, and their occasional reference to it in succeeding copwatches, situates the Watchdogs in a kind of vanguardist position within the Movement for Black Lives. This type of analysis is not an anomaly. Recently Jeremy, who admittedly is no longer a member of the organization, published a post on his Facebook page where he laments the murder of Landon Nobles, but only as a way to eulogize the end of his, "revolutionary work" as a copwatcher. And while Jeremy suffers from bouts of grandiosity, I recognize an identical move on the Watchdog website, when the author stakes a claim in the importance and efficacy of copwatching in the Black Lives Matter Movement,

> Through their diverse and sustained tactics, the Watchdogs have seen marked positive changes in the behavior of cops towards the people they interact with (although not necessarily with us). As importantly, in the aftermath of the killings of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice, and thousands of other who have lost their lives to cops in the past few years, the Watchdogs have played a positive role in a growing movement for police accountability, reform, and most importantly, abolition.

Again, Black suffering is conjured up in order to laud the activism of the Watchdogs (and also jockey for an acknowledged antagonism with police). It's almost as if *we* emerge at the forefront of the BLMM.

Sociologist Avery Gordon identifies a similar psychic violence at play in abolitionist Levi Coffin's account of Margaret Garner's trial. A brief reminder: Margaret Garner had escaped slavery, but was hunted down by U.S. Marshals acting under the Fugitive Slave Act. Before her capture, she managed to kill her daughter in-order-to prevent the child from being returned to their former master. Her subsequent trial then, was a debate about whether-or-not Garner was to be tried as a property. Gordon instructs us that following Coffin's account of the trial he tells, "The Story of a Hat," which she calls, "a trivial story, really." I quote from Gordon at length,

> In response to the demand by a Kentucky marshal to remove his hat in court, Levi Coffin, as would be his habit as a Quaker, refused. Twice. During Margaret Garner's trial, "the story of my adventure with the marshal, respecting my hat, soon became extensively known. The accounts given of it in the Cincinnati papers were copied by other papers in various parts of the country…. For several days I could not walk the streets without being accosted by someone who would assert that I had whipped the marshal" (C 574). Margaret Garner, wearing one and maybe two scars on her face from a striking (a whipping?) had been pursued by her owners from Kentucky, who crossed the same river she did to claim their property in the name of the Fugitive Slave Act. She "could not walk the streets without being accosted by someone who would assert that she belonged elsewhere. She was about to be sent back to Kentucky and then sold, and Levi Coffin goes on for seven pages, full of pride, that he refused a Kentucky marshal's order to remove his hat.[194]

Gordon argues that while Coffin, an abolitionist, denies his fantasy of owning property—he nonetheless displaces Garner and her suffering with a story about flexing his property ownership. The story of the hat illustrates Coffin's power to claim his property---a power he shares with slavers—even as an abolitionist. Thus, according to Gordon, Coffin's account reveals the impossibility of Garner's ability to author her own story. Instead, "Margaret Garner's suffering and trial, becomes the stage for a white man's fantasy of his

[194] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 159.

right to own and dispose of his property as he sees fit."[195] If the slave owners are claiming Garner as their physical property, Coffin claims her as his psychic property.

Once we understand that, "Coffin's Hat Story is a testament not only to his reputation as an antislavery activist, but also to his power to claim his property, his hat,"[196] Can we think about the taco truck incident as haunted by the same psychic move? How is our stand-off with APD, related to Coffin's stand-off with the U.S. Marshall? How do we engage in displacing the violence of antiblack policing when we show up to film? Black suffering seems to slip out of the frame, and becomes an opportunity to celebrate oneself as a figure of resistance. Whether in Coffin's courtwatch or our copwatch, nonblack abolitionists quickly lose sight of antiblack terror. The very moment we encounter Black sufferance, we obliterate it by using it as a stage and on this stage, we unconsciously relish the opportunity to assert our political identity and notoriety as activists. Rather than reflecting on the state's genocidal violence against Black communities, we lose touch with the urgency and horror of this central antagonism. Instead we enjoy our own minor conflicts with state agents and celebrate our performance as if we've fundamentally altered APD's behavior, when in fact we have not. It goes without saying that I am in no way immune to this dynamic. I realize I often unconsciously feel energized or animated by copwatching. For example, I think of the occasion I shouted at the Police union president, "Fuck you Casaday!" or how on a 'slow' night when the Watchdogs have not come across a stop, I say, without thinking, "I really

[195] Ibid., 160.
[196] Ibid.

want to see something tonight." My point is not one about intentionality. Obviously, Coffin, the Watchdogs, and myself are well-intentioned people. But as Gordon writes, "therein lies the frightening aspect of haunting: you can be grasped and hurtled into the maelstrom of the powerful and material forces that lay claim to you whether you claim them as yours or not."[197] I echo Gordon's conclusion that, "The ghostly matter is always waiting for you and its motivations, desires, and interventions are remarkable only for being current."[198]

The ghostly matter of course, is the afterlife of slavery, and it is worth saying that *the difficulty and slipperiness of empathy* (Hartman 1997) does not change if the copwatcher is queer, a woman, a nonblack person of color, or holds an abolitionist politic. After presenting a version of these arguments on a panel at an anthropology conference, audience members kept prompting to me to muse about whether the Watchdogs' copwatching would be less haunted by the power relations of slavery if we had less libertarian baby boomers and more women and "people of color" filming the police. My answer is no (with a caveat for Black activist formations, such as the Panther Patrols). Regardless of these identities, we remain positioned by the ontology of slavery and its afterlife. By the same token, the Watchdogs are not uniquely haunted. The politics of recognition is a canonical antiracist praxis that pervades both BLM-A, the Accountability Alliance, and many other actors in Austin's M4BL and BLM activism around the world. Returning to the antiracist maxim, "the master's tools will never

[197] Ibid. 169.
[198] Ibid.

dismantle the master's house," I wish to challenge the now hegemonic idea that white and otherwise nonblack encounters with Black suffering will galvanize transformative social change. Put differently, this politics of recognition assumes that displays of Black suffering will force a reckoning with one's complicity in antiblack violence and elicit both empathy and redressive action. Yet I have found again and again in my fieldwork that Black pain functions as a mirror (to borrow from Hartman). It energizes either a meditation or celebration of a nonblack sense of self. I argue that if antiracist theory does not confront this evidence of a collective antiblack unconscious, then it is not equipped to keep the Black diaspora safe. I contend that the masters tools the BLMM should be most weary of are the politics of recognition, and not the praxis of Black self-defense.

TWILIGHT

Fall 2017

Kyle invites me to a screening of Twilight, Anna Deavere Smith's one woman play about the 1991 Los Angeles Uprising at Monkey Wrench, a volunteer run anarchist bookstore and organizing space. Half dozen or so people show up. Kyle and his girlfriend Rose are there, along with a white baby boomer who identifies himself as a journalist, myself, and a handful of queer and poc anarchist activists. There's a couch, but most of us sit on folding chairs facing the projector screen. After the movie ends there is an informal talk back among us. The bloody body of Reginald Denny, the white truck driver, sucks our discussion to him and collapses it like a (non)Black hole. And yet, a young Black gender queer activist points out how amusing it is that at the very moment, "the

revolution arrives" the good Black Samaritans watching from home, rush outside to save him. Folks laugh. Emboldened, I admit that I don't feel that sorry for Denny. You could hear a pin drop. I blather incoherently about reciprocal violence and the Black Liberation Army. People just blink at me. Afterwards, Kyle and Rose invite everyone to get a drink at the dive bar next door. I check in with them about my remark, wanting to point out our fetish for white pain despite the enormity of violence wrought upon South Central. Kyle tells me I sounded like a sociopath, but now that I further explained myself he understands where I was coming from. He asks me more about the BLA—he had never heard of them before and was genuinely curious to know more.

WHITE PAIN AND BLACK ANARCHY

By no means is Monkey Wrench an activist community that across the board opposes the use of political violence against the state and its agents. For example, this was not the first time I had attended a screening about rebels at Monkey Wrench with Watchdog members. I have also seen, "The Gentleman Bank Robber: The Story of Butch Lesbian Freedom Fighter Rita Brown," there with Maddie, a young white woman in UT's social work program who works with incarcerated men. This was movie about Rita Brown's participation in the George Jackson Brigade, a multiracial group of antiracist radicals in the pacific northwest who organized a number of bank appropriations and symbolic bombings. Afterwards we were encouraged to send Brown money to help pay for her mounting medical expenses. Simply put, we admired her struggle and wished to honor our debts as young radicals to our insurgent elders. Or even just aesthetically

speaking, Monkey Wrench is a DIY space decorated with art, made by volunteers and the prisoners they write to, a lot of which is very evocative of rebellion. I've noticed a black and white print of a prison burning and its walls broken down so that prisoners are escaping and for years, there was a large painted banner of a hand holding a single burning match to the Austin cityscape with the text saying something like, "we won't wait." Posters in the windows announce things such as, "We don't talk to cops," and among the books and zines you can find other merchandise like old Jericho Movement posters and silk screened t shirts and tote bags with the initials ACAB (all cops are bastards) and even tombstones emblazoned with the epitaph, "cops."

While pacifist in practice, the Watchdogs also do not roundly denounce the use of political violence against the state. We joke all the time about dead cops and wish each other, "Happy Micah X Johnson Day," over Signal (an encrypted messaging system) on the anniversary of Johnson's direct action against Dallas PD. The Watchdog twitter handle posted this same sentiment and it was read aloud by a Travis County prosecutor during a trial of a copwatcher to discredit him and other Watchdog witnesses. I am not very active on Facebook, but if one takes even a cursory glance at the Watchdog feed over the past month, it is replete with tongue in cheek references to killing cops or celebratory, rather than the hegemonic maudlin posts when officers die. In reference to a news story on law enforcement's 'accidental' killing of an innocent civilian, one of the page managers writes, "Too bad they don't mistakenly engage in more cop on cop shooting incidents." Or, before sharing a link to an article about a woman who killed her cop boyfriend in self-defense, a Watchdog posts, "She killed a terrorist. Let her go."

There is also the notable turn of phrase we use a lot online being, "no tears for dead cops," or its abbreviation, "no tears." That being said, the Watchdogs do not call on people to commit acts of violence. Nor do we ever engage in violence ourselves. In fact, part of the code of conduct recited before every copwatch is that you cannot be armed on our patrols. I go into this level of detail about the way we enjoy fantasizing about cops being killed, and prisons burning down, because I think it stands in stark relief to Kyle's and the other attendees response to the display of political violence at Florence and Normandie. With the exception of the young Black activist present and myself, these scenes of Black uprising are not energizing, but deeply disturbing. Which leads me to ask, what kind of revolution appeals to the Watchdogs and what forms of anarchy and abolition do not?

The reaction to Denny's beating at the film screening reminds me of an ethnographic moment Frank Wilderson tells from his time working as both an elected member of the African National Congress (ANC) and as a covert operative of Umkhonto we Sizwe, it's armed wing. Wilderson recounts a 1992 meeting of roughly 100 delegates, 90% of whom are Black South Africans. Co-chaired by Ronnie Kasrils, a white ANC official, the task at hand is to plan a series of actions designed to disrupt urban centers across the country. Wilderson writes,

> We began with songs that lasted so long, and were so loud, and so pointed in their message ("Chris Hani is our shield! Socialism is our shield! Kill the Farmer Kill the Boer!"), that by the time the meeting finally got underway one sensed a quiet tension in the faces of Kasrils and his cochairs. An expression I'd seen time and again since 1991 on the faces of Charterist notables; faces contorted by smiling teeth and knitted brow, solidarity and anxiety; faces pulled by opposing needs—the need to bring the state to heel and the need to manage the Blacks, and it was this need

that was looking unmanageable.[199]

The delegates discuss a motion wherein demonstrators will travel to the Ciseki homeland, hold a rally along with a march and finally stage a direct action by knocking down a border fence symbolically liberating those living under the dictatorship of Joshua Oupa Gqozo and thus figuratively reincorporating the territory into South Africa. The proposal is met with more singing and chanting, until Kasrils manufactures, "an important intelligence report," that says such a motion would be met with lethal force. To his horror, this 'memo' is received with utter delight. Wilderson argues that the joy of the Black delegates and the anxiety of Kasrils are, "symptomatic of irreconcilable differences in how and where Blacks are positioned, ontologically, in relation to non-Blacks."[200] Which is to say, Kasrils operates from the framework of historical materialism to explain and reorganize the power relations of the world, but consciously or unconsciously the Black delegates present at this meeting understand the world to be structured by antiblackness. Wilderson also contends that even among white antiapartheid activists that understood anti-blackness as the central antagonism of the planet/country (thanks to the Black Consciousness Movement), they, "could not have been persuaded to organize in a politically masochistic manner; that is, against the concreteness of their own communities, their own families, and themselves, rather than against the abstraction of 'the system'- the targetless nomenclature preferred by the UDF."[201] Wilderson finds this moment telling in its ability to distill an implicit knowledge among the Black diaspora of

[199] Frank B. Wilderson III, "Biko and the Problematic of Presence," in *Biko Lives!* Ed. Andile Mngxitama, et al.,.(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 96.
[200] Ibid., 96.
[201] Ibid., 102.

the violence needed to bring about liberation. Yet the possibility of this violence is dead on arrival amidst the multiracial coalition that finds the invitation to struggle against their familial relations (Wilderson 2008) instead of class relations too overwhelming psychically.

In both of these moments white radicals – be they antiapartheid charterists or the anarchists of Monkey Wrench-- are faced with the ecstasy of Black Radical desire and turn away repulsed. Similar to Kasrils' Marxist lens, Kyle's analysis of the state and what is needed to bring about its demise does not go far enough. The ideology uniting the Watchdogs is not a monolith so our antistatism ranges from libertarian and legalist (testifying at city council) to anarchist and abolitionist (refusing to engage in state sanctioned mechanisms for social change. In Kyle's words, "I think you'd be hard pressed to find a single institution that isn't abusive."). And it's not that the Watchdogs turn their noses up at a racial analysis, everyone to varying degrees, will acknowledge the antiblackness of the "kkkops" and "terrorist scum." Neither Kasril's desire for the abolition of apartheid nor Kyle's desire for the abolition of the criminal justice system recognize their demands as necessarily Black. We recoil from the implications of the Black Radical tradition. Not to be mistaken as someone who somehow transcends these operations, I can recall my own excitement to attend the 2016 Film *Birth of a Nation* about the Turner Revolt. In no uncertain terms, I wanted to see heads roll, to enjoy images of Black Revolt. Yet by the time I saw the first (and only) Master killed, I let out a small gasp before the hatchet fell, bracing myself for the first blow!

The Watchdogs present a useful case study because they expose this key aspect of contemporary antiracism that implicates a great deal of us organizing as part of the Black Lives Matter Movement. In fact, I argue that this revulsion toward Black Radical desire is also at the heart of the publishing boom on Black Radicalism in the Black Lives Matter movement era and the debate over the legacy of the Black Panthers. I argue that this abolitionist literature, written in the context of being some of the first responses to the rebellion in Ferguson, Missouri, is produced by a similar anxiety over Black uprising. These abolitionists and movement veterans aim to address the emerging structure of feeling among Black youth that sounded like the mandate issued by Michael Brown's biological father to, "burn this bitch!" after the acquittal of Darren Wilson. A New York Times piece measures this structure of feeling in rocks, batteries, and bullets, "As soon as Mr. McCulloch announced the verdict, the officers started taking rocks and batteries," said Chief Belmar, who said he personally heard about 150 shots fired. He said police did not fire a shot."[202] While the police chief's remarks obviously should not be taken at face value, certainly the language of uprising is one of violence. And yet, rather than embracing the rebel's praxis, Abolitionists smother it.

For Keenga Yamahatta Taylor in *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, Black freedom depends upon the end of capitalism. For Marc Lamont Hill in his take on the uprising, *Nobody*, Ferguson becomes evidence of, "the war on the vulnerable." Ruth Gilmore echoes this framing of Ferguson as a response to a class war. In an anthology on

[202]Monica Davey and Julie Bosman, "Protests Flare After Ferguson Police Officer is Not Indicted," *The New York Times*, November 24, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/25/us/ferguson-darren-wilson-shooting-michael-brown-grand-jury.html.

the current movement moment she explains the uprising as follows, "Sparked by police murder, in the context of capitalism's neoliberal turn, the post-Ferguson movement may therefore be understood as protests against profound austerity and the iron fist necessary to impose it."[203] Over and over, when faced with actual moments of Black Radicalism, these authors issue shocking revisions to Robinson's work in order to shush the very insurgency he set out to document. Their books and articles take up an imaginary loudspeaker and shout over the Ferguson rebels saying, stop! This is about ("racial") capitalism—not antiblackness! Or more politely, "Race is the modality through which class is lived."[204] This dissertation wonders, exactly what kind of movement is Black Lives Matter if even its most radical wing, and its most outspoken proponents in the academy, adopt the same directive of the state, "that no black suffering warrants rebellion."[205] Ultimately, I argue that the master's tool Black movements should be most worried about is not Black self-defense, but Abolition.

CONCLUSION

In the last chapter, "A Seat at the Table," I pointed out how negotiating with the state around antiblack police violence gives way to celebrations of democracy's promise. In the chapter prior to that on BLM-A, I wrote about the ways memorializing lynchings

---

[203] Ruth Gilmore and Craig Gilmore, "Beyond Bratton," in *Policing the Planet*, ed. Jordan T. Camp et.al. (London: Verso, 2015), Kindle location 2657.
[204] Stuart Hall as cited by Ruth Gilmore in, "Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence," in *Futures of Black Radicalism*, ed. Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin, (London: Verso, 2017), Kindle Location 4501.
[205] Joy James, *Seeking the Beloved Community* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013), Kindle Locations 2695-2699.

gives way to celebrations of the ally's potential. In this chapter I showed that like these other antiracist strategies, filming the police and bearing witness to state violence gives way to celebrations of our resistance/ impact/radicalism/notoriety as an imaginary vanguard. These three different ways of interacting with the state all share an inability to stay grounded in the necessarily ethical (Rick 2013) imperatives of the Black Radical Tradition. The next chapter examines the rise of the 2017 Sanctuary Movement and 2018 family separation crisis. In the following chapter I continue to explore the ways in which the master's tools of antiracism, particularly that of intersectionality, present a challenge to the future of Black social movements.

Chapter 4: Without Sanctuary

"What brutal imagination positions a site of surveillance as a sanctuary and for whom?"
Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake*

"I care about this community and it's heart wrenching for me to see you know, like this morning a girl who came here when she was two who constantly lives in fear...They have to know that they can trust us and that we're there to help them and protect them."
Travis County Sheriff Sally Hernandez

"One consequence of this is the fear and panic among many of our neighbors who do not pose threats to our community. Some family members are disappearing with their whereabouts unknown. Some parents, fearful of apprehension, aren't sure of what will happen to their U.S.-born, citizen children, not to mention the home they've owned for years and into which they've placed all their family savings. These raids are sowing distrust, not just with ICE but even with local law enforcement, and that makes our community less safe."
Austin Mayor Steve Adler

"Stop Separating Families;" "SB 4 Divides Families;" "No More Families Torn APART!;" "Babies love THEIR parents!!! #no to SB4"
Signs from SB4 Protest at Texas Capital, May 29th, 2017

INTRODUCTION

The Sanctuary City Debate, a nationwide dialogue on policing, materialized rather unexpectedly during my activist fieldwork. Just weeks into his presidency, Donald Trump issued executive orders to increase the targeted surveillance and mass deportation of undocumented immigrants.[206] The subsequent Sanctuary movement in Austin was made up of immigrant communities and their allies who organized nonviolent protests and direct actions to oppose anti-immigrant legislation (such as SB4) and keep

[206] Although it remains unclear if these orders actually mark a departure from the Obama administration's unprecedented levels of deportations (that earned him the title deporter in chief). See Serena Marshall, "Obama has deported more people than any other president," *abc News.com*, August 29, 2016 http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/obamas-deportation-policy-numbers/story?id=41715661.

undocumented families together.[207] Concurrently the city government and sheriff's department publicized their (supposed) refusal to enforce federal immigration law.[208] As seen in the epigraph above, these civic partners understood the criminalization of un/documented immigrants to be in excess of local law enforcement's duties. They felt that these excesses 1) jeopardized public safety by generating fear and distrust of law enforcement in immigrant communities; and 2) endangered the legitimacy of the national project by separating immigrant families.

This chapter explores the immediate mobilization of Black Lives Matter and police accountability activists on behalf of undocumented immigrant families over the course of Trump's first 6 months in office.[209] I juxtapose this organizing surge against our collective nonresponse to Black families targeted by the Austin Police Department. For at the same time that undocumented people were threatened by police, Black folks were *attacked and killed* by APD. Surprisingly, none of the groups I worked with publicly advocated for the families of the critically injured and deceased.[210] I find the

[207] Senate Bill 4, signed into law by Greg Abbott and effective September 1,2017, would punish so called "sanctuary cities" for noncompliance with federal immigration officials.

[208] This supposed noncompliance depends on whether ICE detainer requests to turn over undocumented detainees are voluntary or not. Travis County Sheriff Sally Hernandez and Mayor Steve Adler believe them to be voluntary and claim to respond to such requests, "on a very limited basis." See Aguilar, "Trump administration doesn't view Austin as "sanctuary" city, mayor says."

[209] The biggest surge in Sanctuary Movement support among my antiracist and police accountability interlocutors lasted roughly the first five months of the Trump presidency.

[210] To be clear, I saw Shaun of AAA and Joan of BLM at a rally organized by Cluren Williams. Joan spoke briefly at it, but this was not a rally that they promoted among their members. Additionally Shaun met privately with Williams and he told me once over drinks that he arranged for Parrish's legal representation. Nothing further took place. We did not organize a campaign like we did for David Joseph. So effective was the APD narrative that presented the use of lethal force as an acceptable answer to (real or imagined) Black self-defense, that not even BLM spoke out against the killings. For example, at a meeting on "use of force incidents" hosted by Austin Democrats on July 20, 2017, Cluren Williams, the brother of Lawrence Parrish told Brian Manley, the Interim chief of police, "We have no community support because of these lies," and

Sanctuary Movement's stance toward policing and the general abandonment of Black families by the left during this political moment quite curious and worth our critical attention. Below is an incomplete representation of some of our organizing efforts during this period.

Figure 4.1 Incomplete Timeline

February 2017: **Austin agrees to $3.25 million settlement to the family of David Joseph (17) killed by APD a year earlier.**

February 2, 2017: AAA watches and supports latinx members testify against SB 4

February 3, 2017: The Watchdogs organize an "ICE Copwatch"

February 4, 2017: BLM-A Airport Protest Against the travel Ban

February 22, 2017: **Morgan Rankin (30) is shot and killed by APD.**

February 25, 2017: No Ban No Wall Protest at the Capital.

March 20-31, 2017: 12 day ICE raid results in the arrest of 24 undocumented residents

April 8, 2017: **Lawrence Parrish (32) is shot 46 times by APD, survives.**

May 7, 2017: **Landon Nobles (24) is shot and killed by APD.**

The graph brings up a number of questions: If the definition of deportation is the forced, "removal from a country of an alien whose presence is unlawful or prejudicial," why does the Sanctuary City Movement fail to recognize the social processes and institutions of residential and medical apartheid, homelessness, Child Protective Services,

"we don't have nobody backing us up." The Aunt of Landon Nobles echoed Williams's remarks. She argued that APD's media narratives on officer involved shootings, "Leave us to defend ourselves." "Do y'all ever think of the family?," she asked Manley.

mass incarceration, and lethal policing? In other words, why does state violence against the immigrant family outrage Austin's center-left, but the domestic deportations (Cohen 2010) inflicted on Black families fail to elicit a similar sense of community scandal? That is, how can we grapple with the contradiction between the state and its actors that offer certain families asylum; and hunt down other families with a terrifying, unrelenting, and growing precision? Lastly, what is the difference between the immigrant experience and Blackness?; and Why does such specificity matter? Put differently, what does it means to live *with* and *without* sanctuary?

In order to engage these questions I will first present the case of Lawrence Parrish as told by his brother, Cluren Williams, during a rally at City Hall. Alongside this excerpt from my fieldnotes, I include a photograph of Lawrence Parrish's attempted lynching, a picture of the front door to his home, riddled with bullets, that appeared in the Austin American Statesman. Like the title of James Allen's collection of U.S. lynching photographs, *Without Sanctuary*,[211] these field notes and images suggest that the ontology created by transatlantic slavery persists and requires a different grammar of suffering--that of social death (Wilderson 2010). I argue that the recognition and protection (at least in word) that we extend to immigrant families, and not to Black families during the sanctuary movement hints at the inadequacy of our current People-of-Color framework (Vargas 2016).[212] Instead of the setting up a hierarchy of racial power as between whites and People-of-Color, I contend that my ethnographic evidence confirms a radically

[211] Allen defines lynching as, "a community supported killing" and "a legacy of slavery." See Pedro Echevarria's interview with Allen on C Span: https://www.c-span.org/video/?187245-4/without-sanctuary.
[212] I borrow the notion of a People-of-Color framework from Vargas, *Denial*, 10.

different dualism--what has been called the Settler/Native (Fanon 1961), Master/Slave (Wilderson 2010), or non Black /Black dyad (Vargas 2016). For the purposes of our discussion, I refer to the two positions under antiblackness as life *with* and *without* sanctuary.

While this portion of the chapter "Deportation, Dispossession and Death in Travis County" establishes the unparalleled nature of antiblackness, the next ethnographic anecdotes deal with the compulsive move in organizing and scholarship to level this specificity. Whereas the previous section, Blackness emerged as largely unthought (Wilderson and Hartman 2003),[213] this section shows two striking moments when Black Lives Matter activists do call for a connection to be made between the Sanctuary Movement and the movement for Black Lives. The first is a BLM-A rally at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport in solidarity with Black Immigrants. The second is a meeting of the Austin Human Rights Commission about the APD's use of force policy which is attended by the Austin Accountability Alliance. In the section that follows, "The "Other Immigrants (Who Came in the Bottom of Slave Ships)," I compare the popular intersectional framework antiracist activists use to understand the relationship between Black and Brown suffering to the unpopular equation that Ben Carson makes between enslaved Africans and immigrants. I argue that both conceptual conflations (Sexton 2010) are inadequate because they perform what Frank Wilderson calls the *ruse of analogy.* The ruse of analogy helps us critically examine the canonical forms of political analysis and

[213] "African slavery did not present an ethical dilemma for global civil society. The ethical dilemmas were unthought." See Wilderson, *Red, White and Black*, 17. "On the one hand, the slave is the foundation of the national order, and, on the other, the slave occupies the position of the unthought." Hartman & Wilderson, "The Position of the Unthought."

mobilization deployed when non-black people are subject to anti-black processes of criminalization, targeted policing, captivity, punishment and familial separation. Ultimately, I find that intersectionality, as used by Black Lives Matter activists at the airport action, fails to mobilize a meaningful recognition of anti-blackness.

Next I read the Austin Accountability Alliance's frustration at the singling out of Blacks as victims of police violence alongside Paul Gilroy's condemnation of "Black particularity" in his text, *Against Race*. I suggest that the outrage we direct towards any failure to perform the ruse of analogy (or extended it far enough), would be better channeled against the antiblack state. I conclude the chapter by contending that intersectionality has pernicious effects on potentially liberatory organizing for it 1) dismisses or demonizes theoretical and political commitments to Blackness and 2) does not facilitate the recognition of the technologies of dispossession highlighted by the sanctuary movement (surveillance, detention deportation) and as foundationally anti-black (Vargas 2016). Rather intersectionality allows for nonblacks to empty Blackness of its exceptionality and ethical imperatives and render it useful. Finally, I offer readers a relational (Sexton 2010, Vargas 2016) analysis as an alternative to the intersectional humanism of our current People-of-Color paradigm.

"THEY KILLING US OUT HERE"[214]: THE CASE OF LAWRENCE PARRISH

I have been inside city council chambers for hours with other police accountability activists. We turned out to testify against the Austin Police Association's

[214] Williams, "Shot 7 times by Austin PD (Lawrence Parrish)"

opaque contract negotiation. The city council says they've never seen anything like it. I am there on behalf of AAA, but I stay after they have testified and left. Once the proceedings are almost over, I hear Cluren Williams' voice boom over a sound system and reverberate throughout the building. I walk outside and join the mostly Black crowd that slowly grows more multiracial as activists trickle out from the city council meeting. There are maybe 30 of us. Standing behind Williams are at least 3 or 4 young Black girls holding signs that say "Free LP." Williams tell us that Lawrence's five-year-old cousin came out tonight because she remembers how he treated her. "Every time she came to his house he gave her money and treated her well. Made her feel cared for."[215]

Williams attends to the different weapons that officers fired at his brother's back through his closed front door: a series of rifles, shotguns, and two glock 45s. He corrects the predictable police narrative that the Black suspect had a gun and fired on officers. In fact Parrish did not have a gun as APD reports initially claimed. Rather, the men in front of Parrish's porch never identified themselves as police and once they fired 47 times through the closed door of his home, he was left to bleed while police took their time to search the house for a gun, find a rifle upstairs, and call the SWAT team to report an active standoff. Only then did they call an ambulance. APD maintains officers shot Lawrence 7 times. "Maybe I'm bad at math," Williams jokes, and so he counts the shots, gesturing to where each bullet tore through his brother's body. One bullet entered each hand, 3 bullets hit each shoulder, and one struck his face. His pinky finger was

[215] Her determination to fight for her cousin's life echoed the words of David Joseph's cousin that were read earlier that afternoon before council, "I may have lost a family member, a friend, but I am still willing to face each morning despite every inclination not to."

amputated and doctors ended up using his severed digit to try to repair other damaged bones in his hand. His eye is stitched close and he has broken bones in his face.

Williams informs us that Lawrence is being held sedated in unsanitary conditions under 23-hour lockdown in the jail's psych ward. His wounds are so fresh that they continue to leak. Williams is all too familiar with the murderous "care" dispensed to his brother.[216] *He reflects on the horror of captivity-- himself having spent five years of his young life incarcerated-- four years of which he lived in solitary confinement where he too spent 23 hours a day alone. He guesses that 95% of people who survive this torture commit suicide shortly thereafter. He tries to relate this incommunicable experience to us by describing the filth of the cage. He had to use the same water to bathe, flush the toilet, and do laundry. He gets tangled in this description of existing in his own waste. For a moment it seems like he's having a flashback and may break down, but he composes himself.*

Williams closes the rally on the theme of family. "Everyone showing up in support of my brother, even if I don't know you, and no matter what color you are- you are my family." Williams assures us that our support will be paid forward. He warns anyone walking by not to mess with or made fun of us. He says that we are his family because he doesn't have a family. He repeats this, "You are my family because I don't have a family." He says he doesn't have a Mom or Dad. He's only seen his father about 5 times in his life. He doesn't have children, he adds. He lost his 3-month-old daughter when he

[216]Wilson, "Inmate Health: Jail capable of caring for man shot by Austin police, Travis Co. sheriff's office says."

was 19. He doesn't have a brother, either. He's being held for ransom on a $500,000 bond. His family-less-ness sinks in. Behind him, the sun sets Austin's violet crown aflame. Tourists festoon the length of the Congress bridge like paper chain dolls. Bewitched we let his spell wash over us. We hold our breath expectantly hoping the alchemy of coalitional politics can transform us into kinfolk.

DEPORTATION, DISPOSSESSION AND DEATH IN TRAVIS COUNTY

I find the image of Parrish's front door evocative of *The Door of No Return*,[217] the physical departure point from where kidnapped Africans were made to endure the metaphysical middle passage. Dionne Brand describes *The Door of No Return* as a place of ontological departure from humanity to a position of social death (Patterson 1984). Social death is the process by which gratuitous violence, natal alienation, and generalized dishonor render enslaved people into objects (Patterson 1984). Gratuitous violence is the subjection to indefensible and unprovoked brutality. Natal alienation refers to the non-recognition of one's immediate kin, genealogy, or social ties. General dishonor signals a position of permanent disrepute or criminality. These three components of slavery

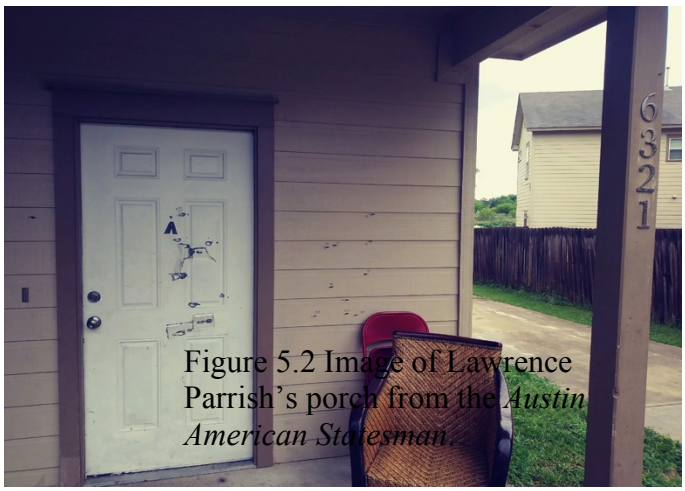


Figure 5.2 Image of Lawrence Parrish's porch from the *Austin American Statesman*.

[217] Curator Boubacar Joseph Ndiaye of the memorial to the African Slave Trade on Gorée Island in Senegal coined the term. I am referencing Dionne Brand's use of the term in *A Map to the Door of No Return* and Christina Sharpe's discussion of Brand's optics in *In the Wake*.

establish a distinct relationship to violence that removes the slave from humanity. As Patterson writes, "No authentic human relationship was possible where violence was the ultimate sanction."[218] Second, the ontology of slavery is fundamentally driven by the libidinal economy, rather than the profit motive. The most seductive inducement of slavery was the parasitic relationship between the master and the slave, "In his powerlessness the slave became an extension of his master's power."[219] The slave had no power, nor did she have honor, nor recognized social relationships. It was this very loss that enabled the Master's sense of herself as powerful, honorable and Human with family, ancestors, and history.

Frank Wilderson proposes that social death continues to dictate the relationship between Blackness and non-blackness. Put differently, while the institution of chattel slavery ended, Black life is still lived on the other side of *The Door of No Return*. Based on his reading of Fanon, Wilderson puts forward a corrective to current frameworks for antiracist thought and action which he calls, the structure of antagonism.[220] Under the ontology of slavery, the central antagonism of the world is antiblackness. The antagonism exists between Blacks and non blacks or in Wilderson's terminology: the Master (nonblacks), the Slave (blacks) and Savage (indigenous). The Master position inflicts genocidal violence on both the Slave and the Savage, though the Master recognizes the sovereignty of the Savage and thus can incorporate them into the Human fold. This is the paradigm of antiblackness, the irreconcilability of the Master/Slave relation and the

[218] Patterson, 11.
[219] Ibid 4.
[220] Wilderson, *Red, White and Black.*

partial reconciliation between Master and Savage. To clarify it is, "the freedom from violence's gratuitousness, not violence itself, that positions the Settler/Master."[221] So the Jewish holocaust, for example, does not present a contradiction to Wilderson's schema. While Jewish people were subjected to horrific genocidal violence under Nazi Germany, this was an event, as opposed to an ontological position.

One should note that Wilderson's schema is quite different than contemporary antiracist thought that tends to think in terms of not one central antagonism, but a series of interlocking systems of oppression (Cohambee River Collective 1986) such as white supremacist-capitalist-patriarchy (hooks 2000). This political and scholarly common sense, grounded in Black Feminist thought (Collins 1990) also understands domination using a Gramscian lens--meaning that oppression is unstable and incompletely established via the interplay of both coercion and consent. Antiracist thinkers and activists typically approach this racist sexist classist hegemony (hooks 1984) with counter hegemonic struggles that take place at the level of both cultural production (Hall 2009, Sommer 2005) and organized social movements (Omi & Winant 1994). Wilderson argues that since the Black is positioned outside of the human, they are also outside of the workings of hegemony and thus subject to a more totalizing form of domination. Therefore participation in the political or aesthetic practices of civil society cannot confront the enormity of antiblackness.

Let us return to Parrish's own Door of No Return. I contend that if we are to accept Wilderson's proposal that the Black continues to be, "a socially dead person.

[221] Ibid 31.

Alienated from all 'rights' or claims of birth," who ceases, "to belong to any legitimate social order."[222] Then so too are Lawrence Parrish and his contemporaries surviving a kind of "secular excommunication."[223] In the afterlife of slavery, how can we think of this notion of secular excommunication alongside deportation? I highlight Parrish's case in an effort to acknowledge the incongruity between the violated Black body/home/family, and the notion of Austin as a Sanctuary City. Certainly APD officers did not recognize Parrish's home as a sanctuary. I propose that thinking through what sanctuary and its absence or impossibility looks like in Austin generates a more precise theorizing of antiblackness. I contend that by retooling the language of sanctuary (what does it mean to live with and without sanctuary?) we allow for a different way to articulate the relationship between Black and brown suffering/social movements.

The attempted murder of Lawrence Parrish reveals the specificity--that is--the **gratuity** of anti-blackness. In William's speech in front of city hall, he highlights the omnipresent nature of the surveillance that constantly threatens to ensnare him and his peers in cages or other forms of captivity and punishment. One example of this targeted surveillance being that between 2009 and mid 2015, Texas Department of Public Safety officers stopped and searched Black motorists at double or more the rate of whites (Latinos are ⅓ more likely to be stopped and searched than whites).[224] In 2016 the Center for Policing Equity and the Urban Institute coauthored a report echoing these findings.

---

[222] Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 5.
[223] Ibid.
[224] Dexheimer, Schwartz and McDonald, "Not so Black and White," *Austin American Statesman*, September 9, 2016. http://specials.mystatesman.com/dps-stop-search-data/.

Researchers discovered that between 2014-2015 APD's rates of vehicle stops resulting in citation or arrest were highest for Black drivers.[225] This similar pattern of antiblack policing is reflected in the Austin Independent School District where the AISD police department adopted a "zero tolerance" policy for K-12 students. The results disproportionately impacted Black students. 26% of all referrals to the Travis County juvenile court were Black, whereas Black youth make up on only 13% of the student population.[226]

Figure 5.3 Cell phone picture of an APD patrol car taken in February 2018 by Madeline Bedecarré. The caption reads, "Police: Keeping you, your family and our community safe."

It should be also be noted that there are other actors besides police officers who undertake the state's mandate to stalk African Americans. Take for

[225] "When accounting for underlying population, however, we see that rates of were highest for black drivers throughout the year. In other words, while the fewest number of vehicle stops occurred for black drivers, a higher proportion of black people was stopped than Hispanic or white people."
See Goff, Obermark, La Vigne, Yahner, and Geller, "The Science of Policing Equity: Measuring Fairness in the Austin Police Department"
[226] PODER, *Zero Tolerance Report 2005.*

example the case of 17 year old David Joseph. David's movements were first monitored by residences of a North Austin neighborhood who posted about him on a private Facebook group. Ultimately, they called 911 to report him to police. David was fatally shot by the responding officer Geoffrey Freedman. Or, we could consider an instance in my own neighborhood of Hyde Park, in central Austin, where a middle aged white renter began surreptitiously filming a Black high school student carrying his book bag to a sleepover. The renter called the police. The student was detained, searched, and arrested for possessing a small amount of marijuana. When I tried to commiserate over the events with the white Latino parent hosting the sleepover, he shrugged his shoulders and took a law and order stance toward the teen's 'crime.' I found my neighbor's response particularly confusing having witnessed his own son, a local high school quarterback, drink and smoke pot on various occasions.

As part of this pattern of state led and deputized racial profiling, Williams also addresses the terror of justifiable homicide.[227] "They killing us out here," he explains to an online radio audience unfamiliar with Austin.[228] In fact, just one month later, Williams's girlfriend lost her 24 year old cousin, Landon Nobles. Nobles was killed by APD officers Sgt. Richard Egal and Cpl. Maxwell Johnson on 6th street during the city's annual Pecan Festival. APD claims that Nobles fired at officers while being chased by police. Nobles' family members and other eyewitnesses to his murder insist that they

[227] The *Say Her Name* report released by The African American Policy Forum and Columbia University's Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies confirms that Black women and girls are also victims of racial profiling, the excessive force, and homicidal policing. Crenshaw, *Say Her Name*.
[228] Williams, "Shot 7 times by Austin PD (Lawrence Parrish)"

never saw Nobles with a weapon. Others say after an officer threw a bike at Nobles' face he fell, causing his gun to discharge.[229] Yet it is the **dishonor** of social death, -the criminalization of Blackness- that allows Nobles' murder or the shooting of Parrish to be a non-event for Austinites. Black Austinites have absolutely no recourse to self-defense. It is only legible as a crime, and a hate crime at that since The Police Protection Act of 2016 was passed by Gov. Abbott. As part of a national trend in "Blue Lives Matter" laws, The Police Protection Act extends hate crime protections to Texas law enforcement officers. The attacks on Lawrence Parrish and Landon Nobles are magically transformed into assaults on police lives. The criminalization of Parrish and Nobles feeds the imagined uprightness and moral superiority of APD (and civil society by extension).

William's own imprisonment and the attack made on his brother's life evidence the ineludible and lethal nature of targeted antiblack policing and mass incarceration. In 2016 the Texas Justice Initiative released their findings that between 2000-2015 6,913 people died in custody, and "While black people made up 12% of the state's population in 2010, they comprised 36% of the incarcerated population in Texas in 2005-2014, and accounted for 30% of the deaths in custody in 2005-2015."[230] These statistics illustrate a particular relationship between Blackness, captivity and death and render absurd the Da Valle jailers' claims to be able to care for Parrish and his gunshot wounds. Despite Parrish's critical injuries, he spent just two days in the hospital before being caged in

[229] See Wilson, "Family disputes police account of fatal police shooting off 6th street;" Carigle, "Eyewitness to deadly 6th street shooting never saw nobles fire at police;" and Spencer, "Family of man shot on 6th street says APD is not telling whole story."
[230] Woog, *Texas Custodial Death Report.*

solitary confinement in a psych ward held on a $500,000 bail. The state is not interested in his care, but his confinement, punishment, and death. Remember, at city hall Cluren names his own incarceration under solitary confinement as having put him at enormous risk of suicide.[231]

Williams's testimonial hints at many more social institutions and process that perpetrate gratuitous violence. In addition to policing and incarceration, Williams names the healthcare industry as equally murderous. When Parrish was at Brackenridge Hospital the family was not given updates about his condition and they were not allowed to authorize elective surgeries such as the amputation of his fingers and/or hand(s). Parrish's family remains unconvinced of the medical necessity of these procedures. They are right to be skeptical considering the history of medical apartheid in which Blacks are regarded as expendable "clinical material" and not as patients (Washington 2007). The decision to amputate Black limbs, from slavery, until now, was often fueled by the medical practitioner's morbid caprice and desire to practice a procedure, experiment on flesh, and/or delight in their dominance--and not by a responsibility to care for a patient.[232] In the hospital, Lawrence was not a victim of a crime, nor a patient worthy of medical attention, he is but an experimental object, a criminal, or more dishonorable yet, a would be cop killer. In other words, Parrish is socially dead. He has been deported from the realm of the Human.

[231] See, *The Kalief Browder Story.*
[232] See Washington, *Medical Apartheid.*

In addition to Austin's medical apartheid, Williams's speech touches on the violence of residential apartheid. He refers sardonically to the East side, the historically Black area of the city as, "The ghetto. The mud. The bad place." Williams ridicules those of us in the audience who put on airs of respectability, but then seek out his neighborhood as a site for deviance and vice. His address to neighbors and activists in front of city hall is shot through with a sense of loss. Part of this loss has to do with the forced movement of individual Black families and eventually whole communities. Williams says he felt this deprivation much more than the material scarcity he faced during childhood. Austin, Texas, like all other major U.S. cities, is defined by antiblack processes that dispossess, exclude, and kill blacks (Massey and Denton 1998). Between 2000-2010 Austin's African American population decreased by 5.4% (Tang 2014). Black Austinites were pushed out of the city largely due to its unaffordability and rising property taxes, as well as its underfunded school system, anti-black racism, and lack of employment opportunities (Tang 2015). The deliberate displacement of Black communities in Austin has a long history. In 1928 the city adopted a plan for a "negro district" in east Austin which orchestrated the removal of Black residents from west and north campus neighborhoods. Now, the recent gentrification of east Austin appears to be yet another stage in the city's efforts to usurp Black owned land. Again, Williams reminds us of how deportation and the forced removal of families from Austin is fundamentally a process of antiblack social death.

Using Wilderson's grammar of suffering I have been trying to show how Lawrence Parrish is positioned as, "a person without power, natality, and honor."[233] Thus far we have explored how the powerlessness of gratuitous violence and permanent dishonor render Black Austin residents into objects. The final element of social death is **natal alienation**. Natal alienation is the process by which none of one's social ties are recognized by the Masters/nonblacks. The Slave/Black does not have any ancestors or history. The Slave/Black has no relatives. Nor do they have future progeny. They are what Orlando Patterson refers to as a genealogical isolate (Patterson 1984). Their existence is but to communicate the Master's sense of his or herself. Natal alienation aids in what I'm calling antiblack deportation--the "secular excommunication" from the Human fold. Antiblack deportation (i.e. social death) impacts all Black genders. Toni Morrison's recent article in the New Yorker about antiblack terrorism in the post-Trump moment is instructive of the way the terror of objecthood is often gendered (Spillers 1987, Hartman 1997). She writes, "I want to see a cop shoot a white unarmed teenager in the back. I want to see a white man convicted for raping a black woman. Then when you ask me, 'Is it over?' I will say yes."[234] Morrison makes it plain that in the afterlife of slavery Black gender, "must be understood as indissociable from violence."[235] Since Blacks are not Humans in the modern world, they are inviolable.[236] There is no violation in their rape and murder. What *is* universally recognized by civil society (if only

[233] Patterson, *Slavery & Social Death*, 27.
[234] Morrison, "Making America White Again"
[235] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 86.
[236] Ibid.

unconsciously) is the fungibility of Blackness. It is the fungibility of Blackness that gives meaning to whiteness for Morrison--and to non-blackness for Wilderson.

By focusing on gendered antiblackness (Vargas 2012) I hope to show that the so called war on Black men gives way to a more complete picture of a war on Black families. To be clear, this war on the Black family is perpetrated by the genocidal institutions of the anti-black state and is not due to any supposed Black gender deviance.[237] When Austin police attacked Lawrence Parrish, and then put him behind bars, they tried to permanently rob him from his family. Law enforcement is not even the only social institution that kidnaps family members from Black communities. The data we currently have demonstrate an astounding precision with which state institutions snatch Black children from their parents and parents from their children. For example, in Texas, women face the highest maternal mortality rate in the entire world and Black women are more likely than both Latina and White women to die during pregnancy.[238] Additionally the Black infant mortality rate is at 10.8 percent in Texas-- double that of white and Latino infants and over triple that of Asian Americans. There is also a nationwide trend within the Department of Family and Protective Services that disproportionately removes Black children from their families.[239]

> According to federal statistics, black children in the child welfare system are placed in foster care at twice the rate for white children. A national study of child protective

[237] In other rallies hosted by Williams I witnessed him and others blame Black communities instead of police for the war on the Black family. Williams condemned Black gender deviance and called on Black men to join him and "turn their lives around." Christina Sharpe argues that pathologizing Black 'cultural deviance' and the inability to explain the horror of social death is part of what it means to live without sanctuary (or in the wake in her own terminology). Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 34.

[238] Redden, "Texas has highest maternal mortality rate in developed world, study finds"

[239] Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, *Disproportionality in Child Protective Services.*

> services by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that "minority children, and in particular African American children, are more likely to be in foster care placement than receive in-home services, *even when they have the same problems and characteristics as white children*" [emphasis added]. Most white children who enter the system are permitted to stay with their families, avoiding the emotional damage and physical risks of foster care placement, while most black children are taken away from theirs. And once removed from their homes, black children remain in foster care longer, are moved more often, receive fewer services, and are less likely to be either returned home or adopted than any other children.[240]

In the face of a state/world that seeks to position Lawrence Parrish as a genealogical isolate, his children, brother, nieces, nephews, mother, father, friends and neighbors all insist upon his humanity and their precious social ties. Bear in mind that it is Parrish's family alone, who organizes on his behalf and denounces APD, the District Attorney, the Del Valle jail, and the inaction of local activists.

Taking this into account, I find Williams's rhetorical move to refuse this family network quite curious and deeply revelatory of the structural and psychic workings of natal alienation. To remind the reader, at the end of the rally on behalf of his brother, Williams tells the audience, *"You are my family because I don't have a family."* On the one hand, Williams is referencing the violence of natal alienation, of institutional forces terrorizing Black families and communities. He's pointing to the state's hand in engineering his fatherless childhood, the death of his infant daughter and now the loss of his brother to a jail cell. On the other hand, Williams tell us, "*You are my family because I don't have a family*" in order to invoke the fictive kinship (Patterson 1984) of the coalition. According to Patterson, slave owners frequently appealed to fictive kinship in order to mask the parasitic nature of the master slave relation. In the afterlife of slavery is there something about the multiracial coalition that enacts a similar violence and then

[240]Roberts, "Race and Class in the Child Welfare System."

compels a palliative performance? As the position of the Master, do we, nonblacks, want to rob Williams of his ties to the world in order to claim him for ourselves? I think Williams's gesture is especially interesting when juxtaposed to the signs that we saw in the chapter's opening. The signs protesting SB4, held by Tejano families and their white allies in the capitol rotunda, lay all sorts of claim to family. "Stop Separating Families;" "SB 4 Divides Families;" "No More Families Torn APART!;" "Babies love THEIR parents!!! #no to SB4" And yet the non-recognition of Black kinship not only robes Cluren Williams of his family, but it places on him an unconscious demand to recognize the multiracial coalition as the only family he can ever have. This is not a burden that the Tejano family faces. They have the ontological 'privilege' of asserting recognizable familial bonds.

In this section I have shown how the threat of dispossession stalks Black families with a terrifying exactness. That is, reading the case of Lawrence Parrish against the constitutive elements of antiblackness invites us (as organizers and scholars) to think about these violent processes of policing, surveillance, deportation and dispossession as fundamentally anti-black.[241] I propose that the Sanctuary debate is actually a repercussion of the War on the Black family. In *The Denial of Antiblackness* João Costa Vargas argues that once the antiblack project of mass incarceration reaches what he calls a saturation point and begins to impact other groups who do not occupy the position of persons without power, natality, and honor. Under these circumstances the state and its actors begin to recognize the problem and move to issue reforms. I argue that the same process

[241] Vargas, *The Denial of Antiblackness.*

is at work in the Sanctuary debate. Once surveillance, policing, deportation and dispossession impact Latino families in Texas, the state and civil society calls for change. Even the chiefs of police are outraged by the notion that Latino families would fear the police. Former chief of APD and current chief of Houston PD, Art Acevedo, recently appeared on a Democracy Now! Broadcast to lament the fact that since SB4, Latinas are reporting fewer rapes.[242] But what allows Acevedo to perform his concern for Latina victims, when sexual assault is the second largest complaint filed by civilians against police departments in the U.S (after excessive use of force)?[243] Initial studies show that hundreds of officers are decertified every year for sexual assaults committed largely against Black, Latina and indigenous women.[244] Nevertheless such research grossly underestimates crimes committed by police for there is no national tracking of such offenses, and sexual assault is one of the most underreported crimes in the country--especially among Black women.[245] What's more, a 2016 audit found that the Austin PD

---

[242] JUAN GONZÁLEZ: Well, Chief, when you talk about the numbers speak for themselves, could you go over some of those? We're seeing—you've seen an increase in reported rapes and crimes by non-Hispanics, but when it comes to Hispanics, there's been a sharp drop?
ART ACEVEDO: There's been a sharp drop. In rapes and sexual assaults alone, the reduction has been 42.8 percent, while the rest of the community, the numbers have gone up. The same holds true, to a lesser extent, I think about 13 percent increase, with a decrease for all violent crime. And, you know, that's the unintended consequence. When you start trying to create the perception that front-line law enforcement officers, who should be focused on public safety, are now going to become ICE agents, you cannot argue with the fact that it's going to have an impact.
See Democracy Now!, "Meet Houston's Latino Police Chief Standing Up to Texas' Anti-Immigrant 'Show Me Your Papers' Law"

[243] Carpenter, "The Police Violence We Aren't Talking About."

[244] Sedensky and Merchant. "Hundreds of Officers Lose License Over Sexual Misconduct.". http://bigstory.ap.org/article/fd1d4d05e561462a85abe50e7eaed4ec/ap-hundreds-officers-lose-licenses-over-sex-misconduct

[245] Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, *Law Enforcement Violence Against Women of Color & Trans People of Color*, 43-47.

discourages complaints.[246] In addition to police assault, the threat of rape facing Black women and girls is compounded by the fact that the city 's crime laboratory is currently experiencing a "backlog" of thousands of rape kits dating back to the 1990s. Just as APD and the city sends a message that the murderers of Black men and boys operate with impunity, so to do they clearly announce that the rape of Black women and girls will go unpunished. I find the call the Sanctuary Movement puts out to repair the relationship with police obscene as it depends on normalizing antiblack social death.

When rooted in the ontology of slavery and Wilderson's grammar of suffering, how can the expressions, "sanctuary cities," "sanctuary jails," or "sanctuary sheriffs" be read as anything other than an oxymoron? I suggest that this discourse of Sanctuary can exist because of antiblack social death. Austin accepts, normalizes, and relegates Black suffering to the position of the unthought (Hartman and Wilderson 2003). Sanctuary in Austin then is revealed as the position of genocidal immunity and antiblack solidarity (Wilderson 2010). Sanctuary is refuge from the position of fungibility, from magnetizing bullets and rape.[247] Sanctuary is deputization, the ability to police (5). While life *without* sanctuary means having no recourse from gratuitous violence, natal alienation and dishonor, and no recourse to self-defense. I am proposing a re-definition of the rhetoric of sanctuary using the grammar of suffering. This alternative definition of sanctuary clarifies the difference between political experience versus political ontology (Wilderson

[246] Stokes, *Audit of the Austin Police Department's Handling of Complaints*
[247] I borrow this gendered addendum to Wilderson's description of fungibility from Vargas.

2010). In other words, living with and without sanctuary is about one's relationship to violence.

The Trump (and Obama) administration's immigration policies that hunt down undocumented families are profoundly unjust and the effort at breaking the law and hiding vulnerable families is a righteous one. However, the case of Lawrence Parrish shows that social death is not an experience of oppression, but a position in the world. Blackness operates at the level of ontology. There is no asylum from antiblackness. It is a constant daymare. The definition of a daymare is, "a frightening or oppressive trance or hallucinatory condition experienced while awake," or, "a nightmarish fantasy experienced while awake." The daymare of antiblackness is that it governs the very places that are supposed to care for you in your most vulnerable moments. The daymare of antiblackness is that it guarantees that you have no one/where to turn to.[248] The daymare of antiblackness is that the violence inflicted against Black families is not recognized as such. It is so acceptable (desirable?) as to be unthought. The separation of Black families and the deportation of Blackness from Humanity does not present an ethical dilemma to Austin residents. Now that we have worked at parsing out the specificity of social death, the next section looks at the refusal of this specificity in contemporary organizing and scholarship. In this upcoming section I present two ethnographic moments when antiracist activist and scholars think through the relationship between blackness and immigrant-ness as analogous in order to forge connections between Black and Brown struggles.

[248] Daymare I borrow from a personal communication with jcv.

BLM-A IMMIGRATION BAN WATCH PARTY AT THE AIRPORT

The purpose of today's event is to express solidarity with Black immigrants affected by the recent travel ban. Over Facebook BLM-A called for a rally at the Austin International Airport. It is styled off of the recent spontaneous airport protests that occurred around the country to denounce the detainment of immigrants and refugees, but with an emphasis on Black immigrants. This is not a move that any other organization has made during the growing Sanctuary debate. Joan is travelling this morning and cannot attend, so I drove to her house and picked up a bullhorn in a plastic bag from her doorstep last night. Now I'm sitting on an airport shuttle carrying nothing but this plastic bag. Once I get to the international terminal I exit the bus. There are cops everywhere, but I don't see any big protest-- just 10 or so white people-- mostly sitting down and talking to each other. Next to them on a bench are three large zip lock bags of cookies and cases of bottled water. I ask permission to take a cookie. I see a box of flyers and I take one of those too. They are directions in Spanish on how to interact with ICE. Since it's not a huge turnout and no one is being detained, we just break off into small groups and mingle. A UT photography class actively takes pictures of the small conversations. I spend most of my time speaking with Sonya, a young white woman who works as an advocate for battered women. She explains that she has already experienced an increase in domestic violence since the election of trump. People introduce themselves to us and the conversation centers around what brought them out today and what their response to the Trump presidency has been.

One of the more memorable conversations I had was with a middle aged white man, Eric, who brought his two millennial sons. He approaches Sonya and I wanting to talk. In his baseball cap, glasses, button shirt, and jeans he could be my father, but is far too earnest. Eric is very energized by the current political moment. During the election he was let go and his unemployment combined with his age in a young tech town made him feel useless, hopeless and finally suicidal. Eric confesses that the Bernie Sanders campaign opened his eyes to the notion of neoliberalism and it gave him a framework to think about his unemployment other than his own inadequacy. Eric shows us the large poster board he brought. It reads, "Protect Immigrant Lives." He flips it to the back and it reads, "Protect Muslim Lives." Eric brought this sign to the annual "Texas Muslim Capitol Day" where Muslims from across Texas visit the capital and learn about state government. Eric was incredibly moved by the human chain that non-Muslim supporters formed around Muslim participants in order to block anti-muslim protesters from disrupting the event. His picture wound up on the front page of the Austin American statesman, he boasts. Then he turns the sign back around and lifts the word immigrant. Underneath is the word Black. Now we can see how the sign originally read, "Protect Black Lives." Eric explains that he first made the sign for the BLM-A rally at Givens Park after the murders of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile. Today he placed a flap of paper over the word Black so that he could write "immigrant."

AUSTIN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MEETING

The Accountability Alliance invites its membership to attend Austin's Human Rights Commission. The monthly meeting is held in a small room around a very large conference table. It is not intended to host many onlookers and there are probably close to 30 of us. We are left to stand along the southern wall and sit or crouch on the ground. Although members of the commission are just volunteers appointed by a city council member, they are sticklers for ceremony. They scold us harshly if anyone speaks out of turn. I listen to testimony given by a number of Black criminal justice reformers, and white mental health advocates. A friend of the Rankin family also speaks. He was aware of Morgan's struggles with mental health and stunned by her recent murder at the hands of APD.[249] *When the registered public speakers are finished, a commission member reads a formal 'recommendation' quite heavy with legal jargon. The recommendation to the city council, city manager and APD is about the police department's use of force policy and its, "disproportionate harm to African Americans and disabled persons, including, but not limited to, mental illness, substance use disorders, and cognitive, developmental impairments."*[250] *The recommendation calls for a transparent biannual review with stakeholders/members of the public, "with the goals of crime reduction, reduction in the use of force, elimination of disparities in the use of force, and enhancement of the public trust in APD."*[251] *AAA is named as one such stakeholder. The commission goes back & forth about minute changes, but ultimately, they vote to approve it. Outside the meeting*

[249] Morgan Rankins, a 30 year old Black woman, was shot and killed by officer Benjamin Rogers on Wednesday February 22, 2017
[250] Normand, *Austin Human Rights Commission Recommendation 2017*
[251] Ibid.

AAA leadership is livid. I ask Parker to explain what's going on. He is incensed that the language of the proposal was just about the disproportionality of policing on the mentally ill and Black. He feels that it is outrageous during the sanctuary debate especially not to include Brown people in the proposal.

THE "OTHER IMMIGRANTS (WHO CAME IN THE BOTTOM OF SLAVE SHIPS)"

The subtitle of this section is a reference to the controversial remarks made by Ben Carson, a prominent neurosurgeon turned politician, famous for his conservative brand of politics and Horatio Algiers story of success. After Carson ran for president in the Republican primaries, the Trump administration appointed him as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. On March 6th, 2017, the first day of his appointment, Carson issued an address to his employees: "That's what America is about, a land of dreams and opportunity. There were other immigrants who came here in the bottom of slave ships, worked even longer, even harder for less. But they too had a dream that one day their sons, daughters, grandsons, granddaughters, great-grandsons, great-granddaughters, might pursue prosperity and happiness in this land."[252] Carson's equation of slaves and immigrants received a tremendous backlash on social media, particularly on "Black Twitter." Prominent Black celebrities such as Whoopi Goldberg, Trevor Noah, and Samuel Jackson ridiculed the analogy. The NAACP tweeted, "Immigrants???" and filmmaker Ava Duvernay tweeted, ""Their dream? Not be kidnapped, tortured, raped, forced to mate, work for another's gain, torn from family + culture."

[252] See Stack, "Ben Carson Refers to Slaves as Immigrants in First Remarks to HUD Staff."

I first encountered the story on the social media accounts of local Black activists and it subsequently came up during our organizing meetings. Unanimously we rejected Carson's trope of the slave-as-immigrant and the way it 1) equated the middle passage to the voluntary nature of migration; 2) blames the ancestors of the enslaved for their current dominated position; and 3) presents a triumphalist origin story of the of the United States-- when U.S. democracy and whiteness were founded and maintained at the expense of Black life. This level of public outrage, forced Carson to walk back his original gloss of slavery. He posted a correction to his Facebook page that read:

> The slave narrative and immigrant narrative are two entirely different experiences. Slaves were ripped from their families and their homes and forced against their will after being sold into slavery by slave traders. The Immigrants made the choice to come to America. They saw this country as a land of opportunity. In contrast, slaves were forced here against their will and lost all their opportunities. We continue to live with that legacy. The two experiences should never be intertwined, nor forgotten, as we demand the necessary progress towards an America that's inclusive and provides access to equal opportunity for all. We should revel in the fact that although we got here through different routes, we have many things in common now that should unite us in our mission to have a land where there is liberty and justice for all.[253]

Figure 5.4 Ubiquitous 'In this house we believe' Yard Sign

As we can see in Carson's statement above, public pressure obligated him to assert the specificity of the Black condition under slavery and its dissimilarity from immigration. I find the backlash against Carson interesting because during this same political moment activists eagerly sought out an

[253] https://www.facebook.com/realbencarson/posts/797060963793705

equivalence between Blackness and immigrant-ness. For example, during the sanctuary movement protests I often came across the sentiment, "we are all immigrants." Another formulation of this equation is seen on front yard signs throughout Austin. It appears in multiple languages, such as Spanish and Arabic, "In This House, We Believe: Black Lives Matter. Women's Rights are Human Rights. No Human Is Illegal. Science Is Real. Love Is Love. Kindness Is Everything." So according to this yard sign, Black= woman = immigrant = environment = queer = bullied. I find that despite the general disgust we felt toward Carson's equation of the processes of social death and immigration, antiracist movements and scholars similarly insist that Blacks and Immigrants share unequal relations of power. I argue that this is so because (although largely unspoken) the current theoretical tools that we have at our disposal to make sense of racism, antiracism, and Black and nonblack coalition building in Austin are racial formation theory and intersectionality.

The racial formation paradigm would interpret the BLM-A airport rally as a struggle over *racial meaning* (Omi and Winant). The *racial state*, as occupied by the Trump administration, undertakes a new *racial project*: undocumented immigrants are criminals that need to be removed from the United States. Through law, policy, media spectacle, and policing the racial state attempts to

Figure 5.5 No Ban No Wall Protest Sign

create a racial hegemony (a culturally coerced norm as opposed to total domination, i.e. slavery). On the other hand, the sanctuary movement organizes to dispute the racial project of the racial state. The sanctuary movement puts forth an alternative racial project: What's actually at threat is immigrant family safety and American values. These excesses of law enforcement jeopardized public safety by generating fear and distrust of law enforcement in immigrant communities; and endangered the legitimacy of the national project by separating immigrant families. The sanctuary movement and its allies--in this case, BLM-A-- resist by offering a counter-narrative about undocumented immigrants and the nation. The counter hegemonic racial project represents undocumented immigrants not as dangerous criminals, but as hardworking families that are an indispensable part of the nation, its history, and its values (of supposedly accepting immigrants, the American 'dream', and America's war against European fascism). Rather than buying into xenophobia and white nationalism, the Sanctuary Movement and its allies, such as Eric ("Protect Immigrants!") and his sons, cast the U.S. as multiracial and inclusive and reject white supremacy. Ethnography, according to the Racial Formation Theory, is a tool with which to get at the dynamism of race and self-making (Saucier 2016). Under the RFT paradigm, my ethnography would be contributing to the work of understanding how racial projects are lived and resisted. Race would emerge as this fraught, malleable identity, for although it is imposed by Trump's racial state, it is never complete and remains constantly resisted and negotiated (even if our ways of doing so are limited). My ethnography of the Sanctuary City or Black Lives Matter Movements would thus prove the absence of complete racial domination.

Black feminist theory complicates racial formation theory by naming the interlocking (Combahee 1974) and embodied (Lorde 1984, Alexander 2005) nature of oppression. Black feminist thinkers introduced the idea that the racial state is also the heteropatriarchal capitalist empire state. Under this intersectional framework we occupy multiple positionalities as both victims and victimizers (hooks 1984) and since our identities/oppressions are intersectional, our struggles have to be so too. Black feminism was born as a response to the erasure of Black women in both the Black Power/Civil Rights and white feminist movements and out of the necessity of creating a liberatory praxis from their specific position. However Black feminist counter hegemony is consistently presented as one that not only affirms Blackness, but goes beyond it -- such as a Socialist, feminist and antiracist revolution (Combahee 1974); or the abolition of imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks 1984); or more recently according to the Black Lives Matter movement, "when black people get free everybody gets free."[254] An intersectional framework emphasizes interdependence rather than autonomy, "We have come to realize that we are not alone in our struggles nor separate nor autonomous but that we- white black queer female male - are connected and interdependent."[255] Intersectionality refuses to center antiblackness as the world's organizing antagonism. Instead intersectionality implies a dualism between whites and people of color, "In order to *become* women of color, we would need to become fluent in

[254] Garza, "Herstory."
[255] Moraga, "Catching Fire."

each other's histories, to resist and unlearn an impulse to claim first oppression, most devastating oppression, one of a kind oppression, defying-comparison oppression."[256]

We can see how the BLM-A's "Immigration Ban Watch Party at the airport" is rooted in the notion of intersectionality, both in terms of identities and struggles. First Joan organized the day long watch party at the Austin International airport (as well as other actions) against Trump's travel ban based on her intersectional identity as a Black immigrant woman. Joan was born in Tanzania, but grew up in Mississippi and Austin. Her own father was deported from the United States. It is part of Joan's politics to stress the existence of Black immigrants. Second, On the Facebook event page Joan frames the protest as an extension of the BLM movement, the Sanctuary Movement and the women's march. She writes, "send a message that "Immigrants are welcome here" and "You will not ban our friends."#BlackImmigrantsMatter #heretostay #NotEnough #WeArentFree #ImmigrantsWelcome #NoBanNoWall #TheMarchContinues." It is the unspoken framework of intersectionality that articulates the relationship between anti Black racism, xenophobia, and patriarchy.

Eric, the middle-aged father turned Bernie Sanders supporter, turned antiracist activist also performs this linking of oppressions and struggles. Let us recall Eric's homemade sign where he calls on fellow citizens to protect one another. The first side of his sign reading, "Protect Black lives," was inspired by the lethal shootings of unarmed Black men by police in the summer of 2016. The other side of his sign reading, "Protect Muslim Lives" addressed islamophobia in honor of Texas Muslim Capitol Day.

[256] Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 269.

Eventually Eric runs out of room, so "Black Lives" are replaced with "Immigrant lives" for the BLM-A travel ban protest. On Eric's sign the domination of Black lives literally overlaps with the oppression of Muslim with Immigrant communities in the U.S. In conversation too, Eric equates his own suffering under late capitalism to the plight of Blacks, Muslims, and immigrants. Again, it is intersectionality that allows for Eric to correlate (and ultimately replace) Black suffering with xenophobia, islamophobia, and neoliberalism.

The BLM-A airport action reveals the inability of intersectionality to address the specificity of antiblackness. Intersectionality levels the particularity of social death and thus performs what Wilderson calls the ruse of analogy. In the previous section, we attended to the case of Lawrence Parrish and established a grammar of suffering that locates Blackness as a position without analog.[257] However Joan's call to action and Eric's sign both, "attempt to position the Black in the world by way of analogy."[258] For example, when we turn to the way Black immigrants are disproportionately affected by anti-immigration policies, the Black immigrant emerges as a kind of oxymoron. The data that we have so far on criminal detention and deportation proceedings shows an overwhelming overrepresentation of Black immigrants.[259] That is, it provides further evidence of Black particularity and the difference between deportation from a country and deportation from the realm of the Human. The distinction that the data makes is that

[257] Wilderson, 38.
[258] Ibid 37.
[259] 97% of deported Latinos are Black. See http://blackalliance.org/ and http://stateofblackimmigrants.com/

Blackness is not an identity or a positionality, but an ontological relationship to violence. So you may hold an array of identities, but what fundamentally positions you in or outside the world is the dualism of living with or without sanctuary, or in Wilderson's terms, living with ontological capacity or incapacity. [260] I perceive further evidence of Blackness as position (rather than an identity) in the ease with intersectionality, a theory rooted in the specificity of Black gender, jettisons Blackness. Intersectionality facilitates the curious ease with which Joan's identity as a Black woman immigrant gives way to Eric's temporary unemployment and suicidal ideation. The intersectionality of struggles must move beyond Blackness in order to encompass Eric's oppression.[261] Intersectionality betrays the social fact that Blackness can only be recognized when conflated with the Impoverished, Muslim, Woman, Queer, Immigrant, Human.

The intersectional logics of the Sanctuary Movement erase the particularity of Blackness. That is, they fail to recognize detention; deportation; and dispossession as fundamentally anti-black processes. I argue that the Sanctuary City movement's narrative around criminality and policing- endorsed by community activists and representatives of the state alike- disavows, "the transgenerational cycles of dispossession" experienced by Black families in Austin and throughout the diaspora (Vargas 2016).[262] The Sanctuary Movement obscures the difference between the state violence experienced by immigrant communities, and the ontological violence inflicted on Black families in Austin. This is

[260] Wilderson, 49.

[261] I am aware that critiques of intersectionality (i.e. Puar) are more about the resistance to thinking of, "black women, or black people in general, as possessing a singular victimhood rooted in blackness." I do not fall in this camp. I am supporting calls to theorize from the specific location of Black gender. See Douglas, "At the Intersections of Assemblages."

[262] Vargas 13.

not to say that Blacks are the exclusive victims of the world's violence, but they are the paradigmatic objects of violence.[263] In order to understand antiblackness and its collateral effects[264] on nonblacks, I agree with Wilderson, that, "We need a new language of abstraction to explain this horror."[265]

The second ethnographic anecdote that opens this section is yet another example of how the singular relationship between Blackness and violence remains unthinkable among the left. Here the Accountability Alliance, another Black led organization, performs the ruse of analogy at city hall by co-sponsoring a proposal for police transparency that understands mental illness, addiction, and Blackness as equally vulnerable to excessive use of force by the APD. I am interested in exploring AAA's outrage at not extending the ruse of analogy far enough. AAA leadership did not direct our anger towards the police's murderous appetite for Black flesh, or the antiblack state's bad faith gestures of reform. AAA leadership dismissed the notion that Black bodies are uniquely victimized by police and reserved this position exclusively for Latinx and Latin American immigrants. In this political moment, Parker genuinely feels that brown folks are uniquely targeted, uniquely suffering, and thus uniquely in need of urgent redress. I would like for us to explore this angry insistence on the non-particularity of Black suffering and the willingness to grant paradigmatic status to nonblack suffering because I find it to be pervasive within Black studies and Black social movements.

---

[263] Ibid 10.
[264] Ibid 12.
[265] Wilderson, 55.

Paul Gilroy offers another example of this dynamic in his book *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*. In light of the academy's growing acceptance of race as a social construct, rather than biological fact, Gilroy finds it necessary to interrogate the utility of contemporary antiracist praxis or what he calls race thinking and action. To do so he explores the relationship between race and fascism. By positing 'race-thinking' as originating in fascism, and the legacy of antiracism in the "just, anti Nazi war" "against fascism and Nazi-race thinking," Gilroy locates a particularity in the Jewish genocide.[266] For instance, he writes, "The Nazi period constitutes the most profound moral and temporal rupture in the history of the 20th century and the pretensions of its modern civilization."[267] However, any attempt to center slavery and its legacy is considered a, "pointless and immoral competition over which peoples nations, populations, or ethnic groups have suffered the most."[268] In Gilroy's schema, chattel slavery did not rupture the ontology of the world, or position Blackness in any kind of 'fixed' or 'static' way. Like the AAA leaders who refuse the grammar of Black suffering, and instead mobilize around immigrant-ness or latinidad as uniquely targeted by the state, so too does Gilroy locate the Jewishness as holding a distinct relationship to genocide.

Gilroy thinks the problem is race thinking and the solution is colorblindness, or in his words, "meaningful multiculturalism," "radically non racial humanism," or "multicultural democracy." To start building this utopic beloved community Gilroy asks

[266] Gilroy, *Against Race*, 5.
[267] Ibid 25.
[268] Ibid 113.

the Black diaspora to stop ruminating on past trauma and cease identifying as Black, "These groups will need to be persuaded very carefully that there is something worthwhile to be gained from a deliberate renunciation of race as the basis for belonging to one another and acting in concert."[269] So here we arrive yet again to the now predictable demand from the left: Black movements must go beyond Blackness. As if a Black-centered approach to political theory and strategy is neither sophisticated nor ethical. We saw it the previous anecdote how this demand is so internalized by Black movements, that Black leaders will be incensed if the ruse of analogy is not performed. Gilroy takes this even further and proposes that any, "political communities in racialized form"[270] announce themselves as "proto-fascist." By reading Fanon exclusively as a humanist, alongside Reverend King, Gilroy unceremoniously ushers Fanon into the Civil Rights paradigm. Fanon's revolutionary dualism (that has since been taken up by Wilderson) is disavowed by Gilroy and its ethical imperatives become unintelligible. Gilroy's Humanism renders any Black centered analysis and movements as the heirs to Nazi Europe. Black self-defense in response to genocide is cast as beyond "disastrous" and nothing less than "Black fascism."[271] That is, Gilroy strives for the liberation from Blackness, instead of liberation from antiblackness.

I find Gilroy's text so interesting because in many ways we are both interested in the same question, Is antiracism ethical and effective, and if so, on what terms? I too propose that scholars and activists in Black social movements retire our conventional

[269] Ibid 12.
[270] Ibid 1.
[271] Ibid 154.

framework of 'race' and engage in a seemingly utopic alternative project. I depart from Gilroy in that I do not wish to abolish the notion of 'race' altogether. Rather I want a language that attends to the specificity of Blackness, a language that abandons the dualism of the People-of-Color framework. That is, I identify antiblackness as the central antagonism of our world, rather than fascism or white supremacy, and I advocate that Black social movements fight for anti-antiblackness rather than an intersectional humanism.[272] Anti-antiblackness requires a relational analysis that, "establishes a diasporic continuum whose fundamental logic, informing cognition, sociality, and the management of life and death technologies, is antiblackness."[273] This new interpretative framework is relational in the sense of the time and space of the Black diaspora, but also in terms of the correlation between eminently Black processes[274] and their impact on both Blacks and non-blacks. Rather than mis/recognizing such antiblack processes, "only partially, belatedly, indirectly, reluctantly, or even unknowingly," relationality always identifies nonblack suffering as a recognizable experience seen as worthy of redress, rather than an un-incorporable ontological position.[275]

How can we think through the Sanctuary Movement relationally? I recommend that we require any analysis or action to start from Wilderson's dualism--what we have been calling life *with* and *without* sanctuary. For instance, when Texan law enforcement takes advantage of Hurricane Harvey to increase its targeted policing of undocumented

[272] Vargas, *Denial of Antiblackness*, 20.
[273] Ibid 5-6.
[274] Ibid 13.
[275] Ibid 5.

immigrants fleeing floodwaters, a relational framework would ground our analysis of such state violence in antiblackness. Meaning, that in order to condemn these anti-immigrant policies, we would have to remember the way police and vigilantes hunted down Black men and women looking for help and resources in order to survive Hurricane Katrina. We bring Black and brown suffering into conversation, not in order to equate them, but to train our outrage and our efforts on antiblackness.[276] Relationality reminds me of a refrain that Shaun, the president of AAA, would repeat to audiences at events or meetings during the sanctuary debate. "This isn't just a Latino issue," he would say. In some ways I think Shaun is onto something. Even though he gestures towards an intersectional framework, I agree that we should draw the connections between Black and brown struggle--just in a radically different way. Meaning, we make such linkages not in a way that subsumes Blackness, but in a way that centers it. Instead of intersectionality, I propose the alternative framework of relationality (Sexton 2010; Vargas 2014, 2016) as a possible place from which to organize for Black liberation.

CONCLUSION

I began the chapter with a series of questions that sought to understand why Austin's Sanctuary Movement extends nonblack people forms of recognition and protection (at least in word) that Black communities do not receive from antiracist organizers and city government officials. First, in the section, "Surveillance, Dispossession and Death" I explored this contradiction through the inaction of antiracists

[276] Saturates I borrow from jcv.

during the case of Lawrence Parrish. We found that APD's attack on Parrish evidenced his deportation from the Human. We examined a speech made by Parrish's brother, Cluren Williams. Williams's description of the state's continued attempts to criminalize, police, incarcerate, torture, murder and separate members of his immediate family and larger community illustrated the three elements of social death: gratuitous violence dishonor and natal alienation. Using Wilderson's grammar of suffering, we situated the ontological position of social death as the legacy of slavery, and the processes of deportation and dispossession as paradigmatically antiblack. I argued that the empathy afforded to Latinx/ immigrant families, and not to Black families during the Sanctuary Movement hints at the inadequacy of our current People-of-Color framework. I proposed that we re-tool the language of Sanctuary to reflect a dualism not acknowledged by struggles against white supremacy.

After exploring the nonresponse to Parrish's suffering, I examined the extensive mobilization of Black Lives Matter and police accountability activists in Austin on behalf of Latinx/immigrant families impacted by antiblack processes. I noticed a compulsory move during my fieldwork to refuse Black specificity, either by ignoring the continuity of slavery, or by issuing an incessant call to go beyond Blackness. I turned to Wilderson's notion, the ruse of analogy, to interrogate the equation between Blackness and immigrant-ness made during a BLM-A protest. Then I compared an instance of AAA's blindness towards the particularity of the relationship between Blackness and policing to Paul Gilroy's critique of "Black fascism." I establish that the commonsense framework of intersectionality structures the left's theory and practice whether we proclaim it or not

(Woods and Saucier 2016). I argue that it obliterates a commitment to Black specificity and so I suggest that Black social movements and Black Studies move from the intersectionality of antiracism to the relationality of anti-antiblackness. Keeping Chapter 2 in mind, we can see how the Sanctuary Movement is a consequence or evidence of, this larger affective and theoretical shift from revolution to redemption in Black thought and struggle.[277] That is, the Sanctuary Movement is motivated to repair the relationship between "people of color" and law enforcement. In the conclusion that follows we will take up the speculative project, what does sanctuary from anti-blackness look like? How have Black communities acted on the dualism of living *with* and *without* sanctuary?

Figure 5.6 No SB4 Rally at the Capital

[277] This shift and the notion of redemption I take from Vargas and James essay, "Refusing Blackness-as-Victimization."

Conclusion: Fear of a Black Planet

"Black revolutionaries do not drop from the moon."
Assata Shakur, *Assata*

"Do you ever wonder why some people blow things up?"
Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*

Today it has become common, perhaps even fashionable, in Black Studies to turn toward speculative fiction as a way of narrating the Black past, present, and future. Put differently, speculative fiction has been taken up by our discipline as a way of narrating the impossible-- whether recuperating what is not in the archive, insisting on *slavery's continued unfolding* (Sharpe 2016), or imagining a transcendent elsewhere. I would like to think about the appeal and utility of this rhetorical device in the Black Lives Matter movement moment. Take for example the recently published anthology of short stories, *Octavia's Brood*, that uses science fiction as an analogy for community organizing. The stories are meant to, "bridge the gap between speculative fiction and social justice," by acting as a creative resource for movements envisioning transformative social change.[278] The editors open the volume with a parallel between the figure of the activist and the writer. They describe these figures' shared imaginative project as follows,

> In 1963 Martin Luther King Jr. cautioned us about adding "deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars." He wrote that darkness cannot drive out darkness, that hate cannot drive out hate, and he reminded us that only love can do that. Thirty years later, Octavia E. Butler wrote in her novel Parable of the Sower that our "destiny is to take root among the stars." The activist and the artist seem at

[278] Sheree Renée Thomas, "Foreword," in *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements* ed. Adrienne Maree Brown and Walidah Imarisha (Oakland: AK Press, 2015), Kindle Locations 93-101.

> first to have been engaged in markedly different lifework, yet they embraced a shared dream for the future. Their work is linked by faith and a fusion of spiritual teachings and social consciousness, a futuristic social gospel. In its essence, social justice work, which King embodied and Butler expressed so skillfully in her novels and stories, is about love—a love that has the best hopes and wishes for humanity at heart.[279]

How is it that when given the permission of imagining another world, the opportunity to envision literally anything, these writers are still bound by a very specific hegemonic political desire and the now familiar imperative to police Black anger. Even the symbolic universe of antiblackness remains (i.e. the 'light'/goodness of the star and the danger/threat of darkness). In other words, why turn to King's appeal for love and Butler's fetish for hyperempathy in order to inspire the Black Lives Matter Movement? Why not call our attention to the Seven Days of Morrison's *Song of Solomon* or the struggle for Afrolantica in Bell's *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*? Again, I am wondering, what is the use of this disciplinary fascination if it does not seem to really crack open the Black Radical imagination?

When Kai of Austin's Accountability Alliance came to speak with students enrolled in the course that I TA for, she made a similarly intriguing move. Knowing she was a science fiction bookseller for a number of years and has tattoos representing her favorite sci fi novels, I asked her if there was a connection between her previous life as a collector and her role now as a criminal justice advocate. She insisted there was, and expressed a deep admiration for the prescient power of dystopian fiction under the Trump administration. I find her idea that the popularity of television shows such as The

[279] Ibid.

Handmaid's Tale, or one could add Westworld, lie in their ability to represent where society is/headed, very interesting. These are shows where the enslavement and fungibility of women or robots are so vivid and their insurrection so inevitable, that audiences would never call for said women or androids to love their oppressors. We would never tether the freedom of Offred or Dolores Abernathy to the recognition and offer of incorporation bestowed by the Republic of Gilead or the Westworld amusement park. We demand nothing less than the complete destruction of each paradigm. And yet, Kai's own work is so committed to the redemption of the polis and the promise of democracy. What is it about Black unfreedom that makes Black revolution so unwelcome, so unthinkable? If the entire history of Black Studies and Black movements have been deeply speculative projects (i.e. how to conceive of an end to slavery and its afterlife), then why is it so difficult for those of us occupying these very spaces to conjure a revolutionary ethic or imagine autonomous Black lifeworlds (Vargas 2018)?

As I reflect on what remains unimaginable in the contemporary political moment, I am reminded of the trouble Robin Kelley has in generating his own surrealist freedom dream that would, in the spirit of his mentor, Cedric Robinson, refuse the strictures of western civilization. Kelley begins by dreaming up, "a group of "Maroon poets" who transform a local struggle over police brutality into a full-fledged revolution rooted in love, creativity, and cooperation over the course of seven hundred years."[280] Yet, when Kelley is finalizing his manuscript he witnesses the attack on the twin towers. At the very moment that the proverbial chickens come home to roost and the victims of empire strike

[280] Robin Kelley, *Freedom Dreams* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002),195.

back, Kelley abandons his futuristic fantasy of autonomous Black neighborhoods. He writes of the resulting ambivalence toward his tale of marronage,

> After September 11, however, my original epilogue/dream felt uncomfortably apocalyptic. The immediate question of "where do we go from here" invaded my daydreams and dominated my nocturnal adventures, along with the constant stench of burning metal, concrete, and Lord knows what else enveloping our neighborhood and the horrendous image of bombs raining down on terrified Afghans.[281]

The suicide bombers and the enormity of the state's imminent retaliation do not ignite Kelley's imagination, but circumscribe it, depriving the reader of his original vision and instead offering the blueprints for a park to be built in the place of the former office buildings. Like the sci fi writers of *Octavia's Brood*, Kelley directs us dreamers back to King. He poses King's 1968 question to the reader, "where do we go from here?" That is, chaos or community?", a question that smothers the audacity of the Black Radical Imagination.

Activist anthropologist Jaime Alves recommends we take up a different interpretive lens. Writing about the murders of police officers; the formation of extra or para state organizations; the reappropriation of wealth from rich white residences; and a series of prison and urban uprisings in Sao Paulo, Brazil he offers a provocation,

> I suggest viewing such practices as generative of an explosive political identity that, while not confined to the world of death, uses the rage that emerges from encounters with death as a political resource to make black urban life possible, even if precarious and ephemeral. The disruptive moment of black rage may be one of these "fugue states" from which one can locate forms of life that refuse to be governed by the racial security state.[282]

---

[281] Ibid., 195-196.

[282] Jaime Amparo Alves, *The Antiblack City* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 14.

For Alves, the moment of insurgency or political violence does not immediately evoke horror, and the disciplining choice between chaos or community. Instead of criminalizing Black rage, he challenges us to see these moments as evidence of a potentially radical or revolutionary Black political praxis--what he calls, "an ongoing underground form of resistance that does not operate under the premises of the state/civil society contract at all."[283] Such an approach for the 'progressive' ethnographer of the Black diaspora, demands a different structure of the mind (Robinson 1983) one which Alves calls an outlaw, rather than activist, anthropology. Such scholarship would be willing to, "dislodge itself from white civil society's morality."[284] Given Alves's encouragement to do the unthinkable, I end the dissertation with Kelley's unfinished speculative exercise. Can we theorize the work of maroon poets like Assata Shakur who writes to the Black diaspora from Cuba as a self-named runaway slave? Could we think of her insurgent poetics as contributing to, "the imaginative archive of the Black Atlantic" (Tinsley 2008)?

As I write, I hear familiar questions being raised. "Oh, that old head?" someone asks, batting away my proposal as a kind of political purity only attainable from an armchair perched atop the ivory tower. "Aren't your interlocutors more concerned with the pragmatic?" another voice inquires. The imagined reader grows more hostile objecting that Shakur represents a death sentence for the diaspora, "Everyone who thought like her wound up dead or in prison." Yet it is Shakur's revolutionary analysis

[283] Ibid.,13.
[284] Ibid., 32.

that condemns current antiracist approach as profoundly dangerous if not outright suicidal (Vargas 2018). Shakur departs from the patriotic duty of the Black cyborg and their sense that 'my country needs me.' Instead, she takes seriously Hortense Spillers' idea that, "my country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented."[285] Thus, Shakur accepts that Black communities are terrorized by democracy and it is the dialectic between Black death and civic life that engenders *the antiblack city*-- be it Brooklyn, Austin, La Habana or Sao Paulo (Alves 2017). Therefor her fantasy, rooted in the immediacy and materiality of genocide, embraces the stench of the antiblack city turned rubble. It is precisely upon the "ashes of a nightmare" to borrow from Kelley, that the *Blackpolis* (Alves 2017) will be possible.

In conclusion, I propose that Black Studies reinterpret the demand for "realism" as defeatist, pessimistic, divisive and ultimately more harmful to Black futures than revolutionary thought. It is depressing to resign Black movements to nothing more than the Sisyphean politics of recognition, that so seldom protects Black communities. Instead, this dissertation locates hope in the words of Shakur's aunt, Evelyn Williams, who writes that as long as conditions of antiblackness remain, "the possibility exists that another and another and another Black Liberation Army will emerge, prepared to kill and to die."[286]

[285] Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," *Diacritics* 17 (2) 1987.
[286] Evelyn Williams, *Inadmissible Evidence* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1993), 74.

Bibliography

Abu Jamal, Mumia. *To Protect and Serve Who?* San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2014.

Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow*. New York: The New Press, 2010.

Alexander, M. Jaqui. *Pedagogies of Crossing*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

Allen, James. "Without Sanctuary." Interview by Pedro Echevarria. C-Span, June 18, 2005. Video. https://www.c-span.org/video/?187245-4/without-sanctuary.

Alves, Jaime Amparo and João H. Costa Vargas. "On Deaf Ears." *Identities* 24, 3 (2017): 254-274.

Alves, Jaime Amparo. *The Antiblack City*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

Acevedo, Art. "Meet Houston's Latino Police Chief Standing Up to Texas' Anti-Immigrant 'Show Me Your Papers' Law." Interviewed by Amy Goodman and Juan González. *Democracy Now!*, August 7, 2017. Video. 15:43. https://www.democracynow.org/2017/8/7/meet_the_latino_police_chief_standing.

Baldwin, James. *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1985.

Baldwin, James, *The Fire Next Time*. New York: Vintage International, 1963.

Baldwin, James. "The Price of the Ticket." In *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, edited by Toni Morrison, 830-842. New York: The Library of America, 1998.

Bell, Derrick. *Silent Covenants*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Bell, Derrick. "Our Derrick Bell Interview." Interview by Jared Ball. *I Mix What I Like*, July 3, 2008. Audio. https://imixwhatilike.org/2013/07/04/our-derrick-bell-interview/.

Bell, Derrick. *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*. New York: Basic Books,1993.

Berry, Daina Ramey. *The Price for their Pound of Flesh*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2017.

Bloom, Joshua and Waldo E. Martin Jr. *Black Against Empire*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 2013 (2012).

Bukhari, Safiya. *The War Before*. New York: The Feminist Press, 2010.

Butler, Judith. “Endangered/Endangering.” In *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising*, edited by Robert Gooding-Williams, 15-22. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Brady, Nicholas. “Louder than the Dark.” *The Feminist Wire*, October 11, 2012. https://thefeministwire.com/2012/10/louder-than-the-dark-towards-an-acoustics-of-suffering/.

Brand, Dionne. *A Map to the Door of No Return*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2001.

Carigle, “Eyewitness to deadly 6th street shooting never saw Nobles fire at police.” KXAN News, May 11, 2017. https://www.kxan.com/news/local/austin/eyewitness-to-deadly-6th-street-shooting-never-saw-nobles-shoot_20180227105917832/994820542.

Carpenter, Zoe. “The Police Violence We Aren’t Talking About.” *The Nation*, August 27, 2014. https://www.thenation.com/article/police-violence-we-arent-talking-about/.

Carruthers, Charlene A. *Unapologetic*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2018.

Carson, Dr. Ben and Candy. “I’m proud of the courage and perseverance of Black Americans and their incomprehensible struggle from slavery to freedom.” Facebook, March 6, 2017. https://www.facebook.com/realbencarson/posts/797060963793705.

Cleaver, Kathleen Neal. “Women, Power and Revolution.” *New Political Science* 21 (1999): 231-236.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015.

The Cohambee River Collective. “A Black Feminist Statement.” In *Words of Fire*, edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall, 232-240. New York: The New York Press, 1995 (1977).

Collins, Patricia. *Black Feminist Thought*. New York: Routledge, 2009 (2000).

Crenshaw, Kimberlé and Andrea J. Ritchie. *Say Her Name*. New York: The African American Policy Forum, 2015.

Dart, Tom. “Former Texas officer who fatally shot unarmed woman found not guilty.” *The Guardian*, April 8, 2016. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/apr/07/fdaniel-willis-not-guilty-fatal-police-shooting-yvette-smith-texas.

Davey, Monica and Julie Bosman. “Protests Flare After Ferguson Police Officer is Not Indicted.” *The New York Times*, November 24, 2014.

https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/25/us/ferguson-darren-wilson-shooting-michael-brown-grand-jury.html.

Dávila, Arlene. *Latino Spin*. New York University Press, 2008.

Davis, Angela Y. *Women, Race and Class*. New York: Vintage, 1983 (1981).

Davis, Angela Y. *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016.

Davis, Angela Y. "An Interview on the Futures of Black Radicalism." In *Futures of Black Radicalism*, edited by Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin, 4729-4876. London: Verso, 2017.

DeLord, Ron and Ron York, *Law Enforcement, Police Unions, and the Future*. Springfield, Charles C. Thomas Publisher Ltd., 2017.

Dexheimer, Eric. "Indictments in Police Shooting Rare; Convictions, Even Rarer." *Austin American Statesman*, May 12, 2014. https://www.statesman.com/news/20140512/indictments-in-police-shooting-rare-convictions-even-rarer?__federated=1.

Dexheimer, Eric, Jeremy Schwartz and Christian McDonald. "Not so Black and White." *Austin American Statesman*, September 9, 2016. http://specials.mystatesman.com/dps-stop-search-data/.

Douglass, Patrice. "At the Intersections of Assemblages." In *Conceptual Aphasia in Black*, edited by P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon P. Woods, 2309-2799 Kindle Edition. Lanham: Lexington books 2016.

Douglass, Patrice. "Black Feminist Theory for the Dead and Dying." *Theory & Event* 21, 1 (2018):106-123.

Eberhardt, Jennifer L., Philip Atiba Goff, Valerie J. Purdie, Paul G. Davies. "Seeing Black." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 87, no. 6 (2004): 876-893.

Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz and Linda L. Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 2008 (1952).

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 2005 (1961).

Frankenberg, Ruth. *White Women, Race Matters*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Garza, Alicia. "A Herstory of the Black Lives Matter Movement." *The Feminist Wire*, October 7, 2014. https://thefeministwire.com/2014/10/blacklivesmatter-2/?fbclid=IwAR0T77CvhSGebWrzIYl9LgfuLwSqdueWaoin-qAU4p7prE_uopU3gs9MlWs#.VDQAMDSVgqQ.twitter.

Geller, Amanda, Dean Obermark, Jennifer Yahner, Nancy La Vigne, and Philip Atiba Goff. *The Science of Policing Equity*. Washington D.C.: Urban Institute, 2016.

Gilmore, Ruth and Craig. "Beyond Bratton." In *Policing the Planet*, edited by Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton, 173-199, Kindle Edition. London: Verso Books, 2016.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Gilroy, Paul. *Against Race*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Glaude, Eddie. *Democracy in Black*. New York: Random House, 2016.

Goff, Philip Atiba, Melissa Williams, Jennifer L. Eberhardt, and Matthew Christian Jackson. "Not Yet Human." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 94, no. 2 (2008): 292-306.

Goffman, Alice. *On the Run*. New York: Picador, 2015.

Gordon, Avery. *Ghostly Matters*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Gordon, Edmund T. "The Austin School Manifesto." *Cultural Dynamics* 19, no.1 (2007): 93-97.

Gordon, Lewis. *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism*. 1995

Goodman, Amy. *Democracy Now!* New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2016.

Hale, Charles. "Introduction." In *Engaging Contradictions*, edited by Charles Hale, 1-28. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

Hall, Stuart. *Policing the Crisis*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013 (1978).

Hanley, Robert. "Witness Calls Brinks Killings Justified." *The New York Times*, September 13, 1983. https://www.nytimes.com/1983/09/13/nyregion/witness-calls-brinks-killings-justified.html.

Harrison, Faye. *Decolonizing Anthropology*. American Anthropological Association, 1997.

Hartman, Saidiya V. *Scenes of Subjection*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Hartman, Saidiya V. "The Position of the Unthought." Interview by Frank B. Wilderson III. In *qui parle* 13, 2 (2003): 183-201.

Hartman, Saidiya V., *Lose Your Mother*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2008.

Hartman, Saidiya V. "On Whiteness: A Symposium at the Kitchen." Filmed June 2017, at The Kitchen, New York, NY. Video, 1:16:22. https://vimeo.com/279666924.

Hicks, Nolan. "Lawyers Accuse Austin police of racism in civil trial over jaywalking arrest." *Austin American Statesman,* January 9, 2018. https://www.statesman.com/NEWS/20180109/Lawyer-accuses-Austin-police-of-racism-in-civil-trial-over-jaywalking-arrest.

Hill, Marc Lamont. *Nobody*. New York: Atria Books, 2016.

Hooker, Juliet. "Black Lives Matter and the Paradoxes of U.S. Black Politics." *Political Theory* 44, 4 (2016): 448-469.

hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory*. Cambridge: South End Press, 1984.

hooks, bell. *Feminism is for Everybody*. Boston: South End Press, 2000.

Horne, Gerald. *The Counter-Revolution of 1776*. New York: NYU Press, 2014.

Jackson, George L. *Blood in My Eye*. Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1972.

James, Joy. *Resisting State Violence*. University of Minnesota: Minneapolis, 1996.

James, Joy. *Shadowboxing*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.

James, Joy. "Democracy and Captivity." In *The New Abolitionists*, edited by Joy James, xxxi-xlii. Albany: SUNY, 2005.

James, Joy. "Introduction." In Warfare in the American Homeland, edited by Joy James, 3-11. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

James, Joy and Edmund T. Gordon. "Afterword." In *Engaging Contradictions*, edited by Charles Hale, 367-373. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

James, *Seeking the Beloved Community*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2013.

James, C.L.R, *A History of Pan African Revolt*. Oakland: PM Press, 2012.

Jechow, Andy. "Community activists rally around man punched by Austin police officers." *KXAN*, January 12, 2018. https://www.kxan.com/news/local/austin/community-activists-rally-around-man-punched-by-austin-police-officers_20180312080126 33/1031522224.

Jones, Omi Osun Joni L. "Dr. Jones, 6 Rules for Allies." Filmed February 2010 at Abriendo Brecha VII Conference, Austin, TX. Video, 13:57. https://vimeo.com/78945479.

Jonubian. "Angela Davis. On the current election." *Instagram*, September 30, 2016. https://www.instagram.com/p/BK_7K8rAorX/ (accessed November 11, 2018).

Joseph, Peniel E. *Dark Days, Bright Nights*. New York: BasicCivitas Books, 2010.

Jung, Moon-Kie. *Beneath the Surface of White Supremacy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015.

Kelley, Robin. "Slangin' Rocks Palestinian Style." In *Police Brutality*, edited by Jill Nelson, 21-59. New York: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 2000.

Kelley, Robin D.G. *Freedom Dreams*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002.

Kelley, Robin D.G. "Why We Won't Wait." *Counterpunch*, November 25, 2014. https://www.counterpunch.org/2014/11/25/why-we-wont-wait/.

King, Martin Luther. *Where Do We Go from Here?* Boston: Beacon Press, 1968.

King. Martin Luther. "I Have a Dream." National Archives, accessed October 25, 2015. https://www.archives.gov/files/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf.

Lipsitz, George. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998.

Lipsitz, George. "What is this Black in the Black Radical Tradition?" In *Futures of Black Radicalism*, edited by Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin, 2132-2367 Kindle Edition. London: Verso, 2017.

Lorde, Audre. “The Masters Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.” In *Zami; Sister Outsider; Undersong*. New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1993.

Lorde, Audre. “The Uses of Anger.” In *Zami; Sister Outsider; Undersong*. New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1993.

Makalani, Minkah. “Angela Davis and the Black Radical Tradition in the Era of Black Lives Matter.” *AAIHS*, October 2, 2016. https://www.aaihs.org/angela-davis-and-the-black-radical-tradition-in-the-era-of-black-lives-matter/.

Malcom X Grassroots Movement. Report on Black People Executed without Trial By Police, Security Guards and Self-Appointed Law Enforcers. New York: MXGM, 2012.

Marcotte, Amanda. “Austin Activists Win Important Victory on Abusive policing.” *Salon*, December 22, 2017, https://www.salon.com/2017/12/22/austin-activists-win-important-victory-on-abusive-policing/.

Marriott, David, *On Black Men*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

Marshall, Serena. “Obama has deported more people than any other president.” *ABC News.com*, August 29, 2016 http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/obamas-deportation-policy-numbers/story?id=41715661

Marshall, Stephen H. “The City on the Hill from Below.” Philadelphia: Temple University, 2012.

McKesson, Deray. “Courage.” *Pod Save the People*, December 19, 2017. Audio, https://crooked.com/podcast/courage/.

McKesson, Deray, Samuel Sinyangwe, Johnetta Elzie and Brittany Packnet. “Police Union Contracts and Police Bill of Rights Analysis.” Campaign Zero, accessed October 24, 2018. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/559fbf2be4b08ef197467542/t/5773f695f7e0abbdfe28a1f0/1467217560243/Campaign+Zero+Police+Union+Contract+Report.pdf.

Moraga, Cherríe. “Catching Fire.” In *This Bridge Called My Back*, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, xv-xxvii. New York: SUNY Press, 2015 (1981).

Morgan-Trostle, Juliana, Kexin Zheng, and Carl Lipscombe. *The State of Black Immigrants Report.* New York: Black Alliance for Just Immigration, 2018. http://stateofblackimmigrants.com/.

Moore, Leonard. *The Defeat of Black Power*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018.

Morrison, Toni. "A Humanist View." Recorded May 30, 1975 at Portland State University's Black Studies Center, Portland, OR. Audio. 2:03:32. https://soundcloud.com/portland-state-library/portland-state-black-studies-1.

Morrison, Toni. "Making America White Again." *The New Yorker*, November 21, 2016. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/11/21/making-america-white-again.

Morrison, Toni. *Song of Solomon*. New York: First Vintage International, 2004 (1977).

Moten, Fred. *In the Break*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

Nathan, Debbie. "What Happened to Sandra Bland?" *The Nation*, April 21, 2016. https://www.thenation.com/article/what-happened-to-sandra-bland/.

Newton, Huey P. *Revolutionary Suicide*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2009 (1973).

Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States*. New York: Routledge, 1994 (1986).

Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. "Racial Formation Rules." In *Racial Formation in the Twenty-first Century*, edited by Daniel Martinez HoSang, Oneka LaBennett, and Laura Pulido, 222-242. 2012.

Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Patterson, William L., *We Charge Genocide.* New York: International Publishers Co., 1951.

People Organized in Defense of Earth and her Resources. *Zero Tolerance Report 2005.* Austin: PODER, 2005.

Poe, Tef. "Generations of Struggle." Panel Discussion with Percy Green, Robin D.G. Kelley, George Lipsitz, and Jamala Rogers. *Kalfou* 3, no. 1 (2016): 7-35.

Prashad, Vijay. *The Karma of Brown Folk*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing. *Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015.

Rameau, Max, M Adams, and Rob Robinson. *Forward From Ferguson*. Washington, D.C.: NiaPress, 2014.

Ransby, Barbara. "Black Lives Matter is Democracy in Action," *The New York Times*, October 21, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/21/opinion/sunday/black-lives-matter-leadership.html.

Ransby, Barbara. *Making All Black Lives Matter*. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2018.

Redden, Molly. "Texas has highest maternal mortality rate in developed world, study finds." *The Guardian*, August 20, 2016. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/aug/20/texas-maternal-mortality-rate-health-clinics-funding.

Ricks, Omar. "Conclusion." *The Feminist Wire*, July 16, 2013. https://thefeministwire.com/2013/07/conclusion-shakur-or-a-primer-on-the-difference-between-morality-and-ethics/.

Rigby, Kevin and Hari Zayid. "White People Have No Place in Black Liberation." *RaceBaitR*, March 31, 2016. http://racebaitr.com/2016/03/31/white-people-no-place-black-liberation/#.

Ritchie, Andrea J. "Law Enforcement Violence Against Women of Color & Trans People of Color." In *The Color of Violence*, edited by Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, 43-47. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

Ritchie, Andrea J. *Invisible No More*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2017.

Roberts, Dorothy. "Race and Class in the Child Welfare System." *Frontline*. https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/fostercare/caseworker/roberts.html

Robin-Leeds, Greg. *When We Fight We Win*. New York: The New Press, 2016.

Robinson, Cedric, *Black Marxism*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000 (1983).

Robinson, Cedric."Preface." in *Futures of Black Radicalism*, edited by Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin, Location 73-218 Kindle Edition. London: Verso, 2017.

Rock, Chris. "Tambourine." Directed by Bo Burnham. *Netflix*, 2018.

Roediger, David. "Making Solidarity Uneasy." *Verso*, July 13, 2017. https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3313-david-roediger-making-solidarity-uneasy-cautions-on-a-keyword-from-black-lives-matter-to-the-past.

Rogers, Jamala. *Ferguson Is America*. St. Louis: Mira Digital Publishing, 2015.

Saucier, P. Khalil. *Necessarily Black*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015.

Saucier, P. Khalil. "Being in the Field." In *Conceptual Aphasia in Black*, edited by P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon P. Woods, 1242-1613 Kindle Edition. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016.

Sedensky, Matt. "Hundreds of Officers Lose License Over Sexual Misconduct." AP, October 31, 2015. http://bigstory.ap.org/article/fd1d4d05e561462a85abe50e7eaed4ec/ap-hundreds-officers-lose-licenses-over-sex-misconduct.

Sehlah, Umi. "Where Do We Go From Here?" Filmed March 24, 2018 at the SNCC Digital Gateway Project, Durham, NC. Video. http://www.newblackmaninexile.net/2018/06/umi-selah-phillip-agnew-where-do-we-go.html.

Sexton, Jared and Steve Martinot. "The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy." *Social Identities* 9, 2 (2003):169-181.

Sexton, Jared. *Amalgamation Schemes*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Sexton, Jared. "People-of-Color-Blindness." *Social Text* 28, no. 2 (2010): 31-56.

Sexton, Jared. "Afro-Pessimism." *Rhizomes* 2, 29 (2016). https://doi.org/10.20415/rhiz/029.e02.

Shakur, Assata. *Assata*. London: Zed Books, 2001 (1987).

Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

Sivali, Kirsten West. "Angela Davis: I am not so narcissistic to say I cannot bring myself to vote for Hilary Clinton." *The Root.com*, September 30, 2016. https://www.theroot.com/angela-davis-i-am-not-so-narcissistic-to-say-i-cannot-1790857069.

Smith, Christen. *AfroParadise.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016.

Sommer, Doris. "Introduction." In *Cultural Agency in the Americas*, edited by Doris Sommer, 1-28. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

Spencer, Bridget. "Family of man shot on 6th street says APD is not telling whole story." Fox7, May 8, 2017. http://www.fox7austin.com/news/local-news/family-of-man-shot-on-6th-st-says-apd-is-not-telling-whole-story.

Spillers, Hortense. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Baby." *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 64-81.

Stack, Liam. "Ben Carson Refers to Slaves as Immigrants in First Remarks to HUD Staff." *The New York Times*, March 6, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/06/us/politics/ben-carson-refers-to-slaves-as-immigrants-in-first-remarks-to-hud-staff.html.

Stay Woke. Directed by Laurens Grant. Amazon 2018 (2016 BET).

Stokes, Corrie. *Audit of the Austin Police Department's Handling of Complaints*. Austin: Office of the City Auditor, 2016.

Swan, Quito. "Caveat of an Obnoxious Slave." *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 6, no. 2 (2013):53-71.

Szathmary, Zoe. "Texas ex-deputy is found NOT guilty in unarmed woman's shooting death on porch." *Daily Mail*, April 8, 2016. https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3530696/Texas-ex-deputy-NOT-guilty-unarmed-woman-s-shooting-death-porch.html.

Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta. *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016.

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. *Disproportionality in Child Protective Services.* *https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Disproportionality/default.asp*.

Time: The Kalief Browder Story. Created by Jenner Furst, Julia Willoughby Nason and Nick Sandow. Netflix, 2017.

Tinsley, Omise'eke Natasha. "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic." *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 14, no 2-3 (2008): 191-215.

Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. *Decolonizing Methodologies*. London: Zed Books, 1999.

Un Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent. "Report of U.N. Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent." *UN Human Rights Council*, August 18, 2016.

Vargas, João Costa. "Activist Scholarship." In *Engaging Contradictions*, edited by Charles R. Hale, 164-182. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

Vargas, João Costa, *Never Meant to Survive.* Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2010.

Vargas, João Costa. "Clyde Woods." *Antipode* (2012):1-13.

Vargas, João H. Costa and Joy James. "Refusing Blackness as Victimization." In *Pursuing Trayvon Martin*, edited by, George Yancy and Janine Jones, 193-204. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014.

Vargas, João H. Costa. "Black Disidentification." *Critical Sociology* 42 (2014):551-565.

Vargas, João Costa. "Black Lives Don't Matter." Hot Spots, *Cultural Anthropology* website, June 29, 2015. https://culanth.org/fieldsights/695-black-lives-don-t-matter.

Vargas, João Costa. *The Denial of Antiblackness*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

Visions of Abolition. Directed by Setsu Shigematsu, Vimeo, posted 2011, https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x4kpni4.

Washington, Harriet A. *Medical Apartheid.* New York: Harlem Moon, 2006.

Wilderson, Frank B. "The Prison Slave as Hegemony's (Silent) Scandal." *Social Justice* 30, 2 (2003):18-27.

Wilderson, Frank B. "Biko and the Problematic of Presence." In *Biko Lives,!* Edited by Andile
Mngxitama, Amanda Alexander and Nigel C. Gibson, 95-114. London: Palgrave, 2008.

Wilderson, Frank B. *Red, White and Black*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Wilderson, Frank B. "Irreconcilable Anti-Blackness and Police Violence with Dr. Frank Wilderson." Interview by Jared Ball. *I Mix What I Like*, October 1, 2014. Audio. https://imixwhatilike.org/2014/10/01/frankwildersonandantiblackness-2/.

Williams, Evelyn. *Inadmissible Evidence*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1993.

Williams, Robert. *Negroes with Guns*. Mansfield Centre: Martino Publishing, 2013.

Wilson, Mark. "Family disputes police account of fatal police shooting off 6th street." *Austin American Statesman*, March 9, 2017. https://www.statesman.com/NEWS/20170509/Family-disputes-police-account-of-fatal-police-shooting-off-6th-Street.

Woods, Clyde. *Development Arrested*. London: Verso, 2017 (1998).

Woog, Amanda. "Texas Custodial Death Report." *Texas Justice Initiative*, July 2016, http://texasjusticeinitiative.org/publications/.

Woods, Tryon P. and P. Khalil Saucier. "Introduction." In *Conceptual Aphasia in Black*, edited by Tryon P. Woods and P. Khalil Saucier, 163-925. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016.